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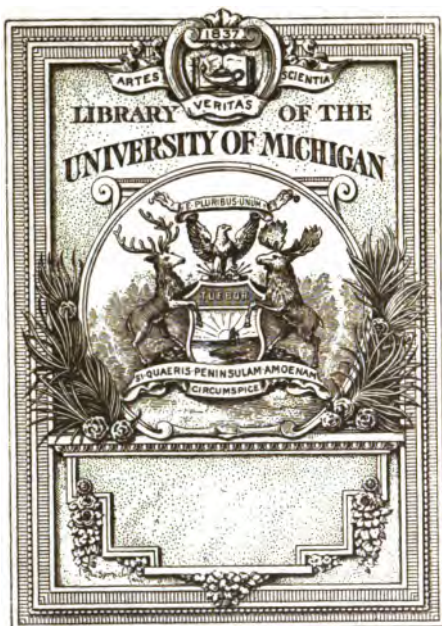
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HE THAT WILL NOT
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HE THAT WILL NOT WHEN HE MAY



BY

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Ms. A. 5. 20, 16, 15

HE THAT WILL NOT WHEN HE MAY.

CHAPTER I.

THE Easter holidays were drawing near an end, and the family at Markham Chase had fallen into a state of existence somewhat different from its usual dignified completeness of life. When I say that the head of the house was Sir William Markham, once Under-Secretary for the Colonies, once President of the Board of Trade, and still, though in opposition, a distinguished member of his party and an important public personage, it is scarcely necessary to add that his house was one of the chief houses in the county, and that "the best people" were to be found there, especially at those times when fashionable gatherings take place, in the country. At Easter the party was of the best kind, sprinkled with great personages, a party such as we should all have liked to be asked to meet. But these fine people had melted away; they had gone on to other great houses, they had got on the wing for town, where, indeed, the Markhams themselves were going early, like most Parliamentary people. Sir William too was away. He was visiting the head of his party in one of the midland counties, helping to settle the programme of enlightened and patriotic opposition for the rest of the session, some

untoward events having deranged the system previously decided upon. To say that Sir William's absence was a relief would be untrue; for though he was somewhat punctilious and overwhelming in his orderliness he was greatly admired by his family, and loved—as much as was respectful and proper. But when he went away, and when all the fine people went away, the house without any demonstration slid smoothly, as it were down an easy slope of transition, into a kind of nursery life, delightful to those who were left behind. The family consisted, to begin at the wrong end, of two schoolboys, and two little girls who were in the hands of a governess. But mademoiselle was away too. There was nobody left at home but mamma and Alice—imagine the rapture of the children thus permitted to be paramount! There was a general dinner for everybody at two o'clock; and in the afternoon, as often as not, Lady Markham herself would be persuaded to go out to their picnic teas in the woods, and all kinds of juvenile dissipations. The nursery meals were superseded altogether. Old Nurse might groan, but she dared not say a word, for was not mamma the ring-leader in everything? There was no authority but hers in the house, and all the servants looked on benignant. In the evening when it was impossible to stay out any longer, they would dance, Alice “pretending” to be the dancing mistress, which was far better fun than *real* dancing. There was no need to run away, or to keep quiet for fear of disturbing papa. In short, a mild Carnival was going on in the house, only dashed by the terrible thought that in a week the holidays would be over. In a week the boys would go back to school, the girls to their governess. The budding woods would become to the one and the other only a recollection, or a sight coldly seen during the course of an orderly walk. Then the boys would have the best of it. They would go away among all their friends, with the delights of boating and cricket, whereas the little girls would

relapse into blue sashes and a correct appearance at dessert, followed, alas, in no small time, by complete loneliness when mamma went to London, and everybody was away.

"Don't let us think about it," said little Bell; "it will be bad enough when it comes. Oh, mamma, come and play the *Tempête*. Alice is going to teach us. Harry, you be my partner, you dance a great deal the best."

This produced a cry of indignant protestation from Mary, whom they all called Marie with a very decided emphasis on the last syllable. "L'puleh Roland ~~about~~ all last night," she said, "when he was thinking of something else all the time; it is my turn to have Harry now."

"Don't you see," said Alice, "that Roland is much more your size? It doesn't do to have a little one and a big one in the *Tempête*. He mustn't think of anything else. Don't you know Rol, if you don't take a little trouble you will never learn to dance, and then no one will ask you out when you grow up. I should not like, for my part, when all the others went out to be always left moping at home."

"Much I'd mind," said Roland with a precocious scorn of society. But just then the music struck up, and the lesson began. Roland was generally thinking of something else, but Harry threw himself into the dance with all the simple devotion of a predestined guardsman. That was to be a great part of his duty in life, and he gave himself up to it dutifully. The drawing-room was very large, partially divided by two pillars, which supported a roof painted with clouds and goddesses in the taste of the seventeenth century. The outer half was but partially lighted, while in the inner part all was bright. In the right-hand corner, behind Lady Markham, was a third room at right angles to this, like the transept crossing a long nave, divided from the drawing-room by curtains half-drawn, and

faintly lighted too by a silver lamp. Thus the brilliant interior where the children were dancing was thrown up by two dimnesses; the girls in their light frocks, the bright faces and curls, the abundant light which showed the pictures on the walls, and all the details of the furniture, were thus doubly gay and bright in consequence. The children moving back and forward, Alice now here, now there, with one side and another as necessity demanded, flitting among them in all her softer grace of young womanhood; and the beautiful mother, the most beautiful of all, smiling on them from the piano, turning round to criticise and encourage, while her hands flashed over the keys, made the prettiest picture. There was an *abandon* of innocent gaiety in the scene, an absence of every harsh tone and suggestion which made it perfect. Was there really no evil and trouble in the place lighted up by the soft pleasure of the women, the mirth of the children? You would have said so—but that just then, though she did not stop smiling, Lady Markham sighed. Her children were in pairs, Harry and Bell, Roland and Marie—but where was Alice's brother? "Ah, my Paul!" she said within herself, but played on. Thus there was one note out of harmony—one, if no more.

Almost exactly coincident with this sigh the door of the drawing-room opened far down in the dim outer part, and two men came in. The house was so entirely given up to this innocent sway of youth, that there was no reason why they should particularly note the opening of the door. It could not be papa coming in, who was liable to be disturbed by such a trifle as a dance, or any serious visitor, or even the elder brother, who would, when he was at home, occasionally frown down the revels. Accordingly, their ears being quickened by no alarm, no one heard the opening of the door, and the two strangers came in unobserved. One was quite young, not much more than a youth, slim, and, though not very tall, looking taller than he was; the other was

of a short, thick-set figure, neither graceful nor handsome, who followed his companion with a mixture of reluctance and defiance, strange enough in such a scene. As they came towards the light this became still more noticeable. The second stranger did not seem to have any affinity with the place in which he found himself, and he had the air of being angry to find himself here. They had the full advantage of the pretty scene as they approached, for their steps were inaudible on the thick carpet, and the merry little company was absorbed in its own proceedings. All at once, however, the music ceased with a kind of shriek on a high note, the dancers, alarmed, stopped short, and Lady Markham left the piano and flew forward, holding out her hands. "Paul!" she cried, "Paul!"

"Paul!" cried Alice, following her mother, and "Paul!" in various tones echoed the little girls and boys. The strange man who had come in with Paul had time to remark them while the other was receiving the greeting of his mother and sister.

"I thought some one would be sure to come and spoil the fun," Roland said, taking the opportunity to get far from the little ring of performers.

"Now we shall get no more good of mamma," said his little partner with a disconsolate face; but what was this to the joy of the mother and elder sister, whose faces were lighted up with a sudden happiness, infinitely warmer than the innocent pleasure which the new-comers had disturbed!

"We thought you were not coming," said Lady Markham. "Oh, Paul, you have been hard upon us not to write! but no, my dear, I am not going to scold you. I am too happy to have you at last. Have you had any dinner? Alice, ring the bell, and order something for your brother."

"You do not see that I am not alone, mother," said Paul, with a tone so solemn that both the ladies were startled, not knowing what it could mean. "I have

brought with me a very particular friend, who I hope will stay for a little." It was then for the first time that Lady Markham perceived her son's companion.

"You know," she said, "how glad I always am to see your friends; but you must tell me his name," she added with a smile, holding out her hand, "this is a very imperfect introduction." The sweetness of her look as she turned to the stranger dazzled him. There was a moment's confusion on the part of both the men, as this beautiful, smiling lady put her delicate fingers into a rough hand brought forth with a certain reluctance and shamefacedness. She too changed colour a little, and a look of surprise came into her face on a closer view of her son's friend.

"I thank you for your kind reception of me, my lady," said the man; "but Markham, you had better explain to your mother who I am. I go nowhere under false pretences."

Now that the light was full upon him the difference showed all the more. His rough looks, his dress, not shabby, still less dirty, but uncared for, his coarse boots, the general aspect of his figure, which was neither disorderly nor disreputable, but unquestionably not that of a gentleman, seemed to communicate a sort of electric shock to the little company. The boys pressed forward with a simultaneous idea that Paul was in custody for something or other, and heroic intentions of pouncing upon the intruder and rescuing their brother. Alice gazed at him appalled, with some fancy of the same kind passing through her mind. Only Lady Markham, though she had grown pale, preserved her composure.

"I cannot be anything but glad to see a friend of my boy's," she said, faltering slightly; but there passed through her mind a silent thanksgiving: Thank Heaven, his father was away!

"This is Spears," said Paul, curtly. "You needn't be so fastidious; my mother is not that sort. Mamma,

this is a man to whom I owe more than all the dons put together. You ought to be proud to see him in your house. No, we haven't dined, and we've had a long journey. Let them get us something as soon as possible. Hallo, Brown, put this gentleman's things into the greenroom—I suppose we may have the greenroom?—and tell Mrs. Fry, as soon as she can manage it, to send us something to eat.”

“I took the liberty to order something directly, as soon as I saw Mr. Markham, my lady,” said Brown. There was a look of mingled benevolence and anxiety in this functionary's face. He was glad to see his young master come back, but he did not conceal his concern at the company in which he was. “The greenroom, my lady?”

“The greenroom is quite a small room,” said Lady Markham, faltering. She looked at the stranger with a doubtful air. He was not a boy to be put into such a small place; but then, on the other hand——

“A small room is no matter to me,” said Spears. “I'm not used to anything different. In such a career as mine we're glad to get shelter anywhere.” He laughed as he spoke of his career. What was his career? He looked as if he expected her to know. Lady Markham concealed her perplexity by a little bow, and turned to Brown, who was waiting her orders with a half-ludicrous sentimental air of sympathy with his mistress.

“Put Mr. Spears into the chintz-room in the east wing; it is a better room,” she said. Then she led the way into the brightness, on the verge of which they had been standing. “It is almost too warm for fires,” she said, “but you may like to come nearer to it after your journey. Where have you come from, Paul? Children, now that you have seen Paul, you had better go up stairs to bed.”

“I knew how it would be,” said Marie; “no one cares for us now Paul has come.”

"No one will so much as see mamma as long as he is here," said Bell; while the boys, withdrawing reluctantly, stopping to whisper, and throw black looks back upon the stranger as they strolled away, wondered almost audibly what sort of fellow Paul had got with him. "A bailiff, I think," said Roland; "just the sort of fellow that comes after the men in *Harry Lorrequer*." "Or he's done something, and it's a turn-key," said Harry. Elder brothers were in the way of getting into trouble in the works with which these young heroes were familiar. Thus at Paul's appearance the pretty picture broke up and faded away like a phantasmagoria. Childhood and innocence disappeared, and care came back. The aspect of the very room changed where now there was the young man, peremptory and authoritative, and the two ladies tremulous with the happiness of his return, yet watching him with breathless anxiety, reading, or trying to read, every change in his face.

"Your last letter was from Yorkshire, Paul; what have you been doing? We tried to make out, but we could not. You are so unsatisfactory, you boys; you never will give details of anything. Did you go to see the Normantons? or were you——"

"I was nowhere—that you know of, at least," said Paul. "I was with Spears, holding meetings. We went from one end of the county to another. I can't tell you where we went; it would be harder to say where we didn't go."

Lady Markham looked at her son's companion with a bewildered smile. "Mr. Spears, then, Paul—I suppose—knows a great many people in Yorkshire?" She had not a notion what was meant by holding meetings. He did not indeed look much like a man who would know many "people" in Yorkshire. "People" meant not the country folks, you may be sure, but the great county people, the Yorkshire gentry, the only class which to Lady Markham told in a county. This

was no fault of hers, but only because the others were beyond her range of vision. No, he did not look like a man who would know many people in Yorkshire; but, short of that, what could Paul mean? Lady Markham did not know what significance there really was in what Paul said.

"We saw a great many Yorkshire people; but I go where I am called," said the stranger, "not only where there are people I know."

Seen in the full light, there was nothing repulsive or disagreeable about the man. He looked like one of the men who came now and then to the Chase to put something in order; some clock that had gone wrong, or something about the decorations. He sat a little uneasily upon the sofa where he had placed himself. His speech was unembarrassed, but nothing else about him. He was out of place. To see him there in the midst of this family it was as if he had dropped from another planet; he did not seem to belong to the same species. But his speech was easy enough, though nothing else; he had a fine melodious voice, and he seemed to like to use it.

"I hope we did good work there," he said; "not perhaps of a kind that you would admire, my lady: but from my point of view, excellent work; and Markham, though he is a young aristocrat, was of great use. An enthusiast is always a valuable auxiliary. I do not know when I have made a more successful round. It has taken us just a week."

Lady Markham bowed in bewildered assent, not knowing what to say. She smiled out of sheer politeness, attending to every word, though she could not form an idea of what he meant. She did not care, indeed, to know what Mr. Spears had been doing. It was her son she wanted to know about; but the laws of politeness were imperative. Meanwhile Paul walked about uneasily, placing himself for one moment in front of the expiring fire, then moving from spot to spot,

looking intently at some picture or knick-knack he had seen a thousand times before. "You have been getting some new china," he burst forth, after various suppressed signs of impatience. Now that he had brought his friend here, he did not seem desirous that his mother should attend so closely to all he said.

"New china! my dear boy, you have known it all your life," said Lady Markham. We have only shifted it from one cabinet to another. It is the same old *Sèvres*. Perhaps Mr. Spears takes an interest in china. Show it to him, Paul. It is a valuable cup; it is supposed to have been made for Madame du Barry."

"No," said the strange visitor, "I know nothing about it. What makes it valuable, I wonder? I don't understand putting such a price on things that if you were to let them drop would be smashed into a thousand pieces."

"But you must not let it drop," said Lady Markham, with a little alarm. "I daresay it is quite a fictitious kind of value. Still, I like my *Sèvres*. It is a very pretty ornament."

"Just so," said Spears, with a certain patronage in his tone. "In a luxurious house like this decoration is necessary—and I don't say that it has not a very good effect. But in the places I am used to, a common teacup would be far more useful. Still, I do not deny the grace of ornament," he added, with a smile. "Life can go on very well without it, but it would be stupid to go against it here."

Lady Markham once more made him a little bow. He spoke as if he intended a compliment; but what did the man mean? And Paul set down the cup roughly as if he would have liked to bring the whole *étagère* to the ground. Altogether it was a confusion, almost a pain, to have him here and yet not to have him. There were so many things she wanted to ask and to know. She gave her son a wistful look. But just then Brown came in to say that the hasty meal

which had been prepared was ready. Lady Markham rose. She put out her hand to take her son's arm.

"Were you coming, mother? Don't take so much trouble; it would only be a bore to you," said Paul. "Spears and I will get on very well by ourselves without bothering you."

The tears started into Lady Markham's eyes. She turned a wondering look upon Alice as Paul and his companion went away down the dim length of the room, disappearing from them. Alice had been hovering about her brother, trying to say a word to him now and then, but Paul was too much intent upon what was going on between his friend and his mother to pay any attention. The look of dismay and wonder and blank disappointment that passed between them could not be described. Had Paul been alone they would both have gone with him to the dining-room: they would have sent away Brown and waited on him—his mother carving for him, Alice flitting about to get anything he wanted. They would have asked a hundred questions, and given him a hundred details of home events, and made the whole atmosphere bright with tender happiness and soft laughter and love. Now they stood and looked at each other listening to the footsteps as they crossed the hall.

"It is all this man whom he has brought with him," Lady Markham said.

CHAPTER II.

THE children were all open-eyed and open-mouthed next morning to see Paul's friend. As for the boys, they did not feel at all sure what might have been going on during the night, or whether Paul's friend would be visible in the morning. "It is money those sort of fellows want," Roland said; and then the question arose whether papa being away mamma would have money enough to satisfy such a claimant. The little girls besieged Alice with questions. Who was that strange man? He looked exactly like the man that came to wind the clocks.

"He is a friend of Paul's; hush—hush!" said Alice; "you must all be very polite and not stare at him."

"But how can he be a friend?" demanded Bell.

"He is a bailiff," said Roland. "In *Harry Lorrequer* there is somebody exactly like that."

"Oh, hush children, for mamma's sake! he will come in directly. He is Paul's friend. Grown-up people do not go by appearances like children. Paul says he has done him more good than all the dons. Most likely he is a very learned man—or an author or something," Alice said.

"Oh, an author! they're a queer lot," said Harry, with relief. At all events, an author was less objectionable than a bailiff.

Lady Markham came in before these questions were over. She was not all so bright as usual. Though she smiled upon them as they all came round her, it was not her own natural smile; and she had a cap on, a thing which she only wore when she was out of sorts, a kind of signal of distress. The family were divided as to this cap. Some of them were in favour of it, some

against it. The little girls thought it made their mother look old, whereas Alice was of opinion that it imparted dignity to her appearance.

"I don't want to have a mother just as young and a great deal prettier than I am," she said. But Bell and Marie called out, "Oh, that odious cap!"

"Why should mamma, only because she is mamma, cover up all her pretty hair? It is such pretty hair! mine is just the same colour," said Bell, who was inclined to vanity.

Lady Markham smiled upon this charming nonsense, but it was not her own smile. "Has any one seen Paul this morning?" she said, with a sigh.

What a change there was in everything! Paul had not come into his mother's dressing-room last night to talk over all he had been doing and meant to do, as had always been his habit when he came home. And when Lady Markham went to her boy's room on her way down stairs, thinking of nothing but the little laughing lecture she was wont to administer on finding him not yet out of bed—which was the usual state of affairs—what was her surprise to find Paul out of his room, already dressed, and "gone for a walk." Brown meeting her in the hall told her this with a subdued voice and mingled wonder and sympathy in his face.

"Mr. Markham is turning over a new leaf, my lady," he said, with the license of an old servant, who had seen Paul born, so to speak.

"I am very glad to hear it—it is so much better for him," Lady Markham said. So it was, no doubt; but this change, even of the bad habit which was familiar to her, gave her a little shock. Therefore it was with a failure of her usual bright cheerfulness that she took her place at the breakfast-table.

"Has any one seen Paul?" she said.

"Oh, fancy seeing Paul already!" cried the little girls. "He will come in when we have all done

breakfast, and Brown will bring him everything quite hot, after we have waited and waited. Brown makes dreadful favourites, don't you think so? He does not mind what he does for Paul."

"Paul has gone out for a walk," said Lady Markham, not without solemnity.

There was a cry of astonishment all round the table. Roland gave Harry a little nod of intelligence. ("He will have found it was no use, and he will have taken him away.") Alice had looked up into her mother's face with consternation; but as she was Paul's unhesitating partisan through everything, she recovered herself at once.

"He must be showing Mr. Spears the Park," she said. "What a good thing if he will take to getting up early."

And nobody could say anything against that. Getting up early was a virtue in which Paul had been sadly deficient, as everybody was aware.

However, this was long enough to have been occupied about Paul, and the children, tired of the subject, had already plunged into their own affairs, when their elder brother suddenly appeared, ushering in Mr. Spears—who in the morning light looked more out of place than ever—through the great bow window which opened on the lawn. The stranger had his hat in his hand, and made an awkward sort of bow.

"I am afraid it is a liberty, my lady," he said stepping in with shoes all wet from the dewy grass. He did not know what to do with his hat, and ended by putting it under his chair when he got to the table. But by that time his embarrassment had disappeared, and his face grew benignant as he looked round, before sitting down, upon the girls and boys. "The sight of children is a benediction," he said with that softening which mothers know by instinct. He was very like the man who wound up the clocks, who was a most respectable country tradesman; but this look

reconciled Lady Markham to him more than anything else which had happened yet.

"You are fond of children?" she said.

"I ought to be. I have had six of my own; but they had hard times after my wife died, and there are but three left."

"Ah!" Lady Markham cried out of the depths of her heart. She looked round upon her own children, and the tears came to her eyes. "I am very, very sorry. There can be nothing in the world so dreadful."

"It is a pull," said her visitor. "Yes, it is a pull. A man does not know what it is till he has gone through it. Often you think, poor things, it is better for them; you would never have been able to rear them as you ought; but when it comes it is a pull; though you may have no bread to give them, it is hard to part with them."

He had begun to eat his breakfast very composedly, notwithstanding this. The way he held his fork was a wonder to Marie who had but recently acquired full mastery of her own, and Harry had watched with great gravity and interest the passage of the stranger's knife to his mouth. But Lady Markham no longer noticed these things. She forgot that he was like the man that wound up the clocks.

"I always feel," she said, "when I hear of losses like yours as if I ought to go down on my knees and beg your pardon for being so much better off—thank God!"

Spears looked up at her suddenly, putting down his knife and fork. Here was a strange thing; while all the rest were so conscious of the difference between them, the two chief persons had forgotten it. But he did not make any immediate reply. He looked at her wondering, grateful, understanding; and that piece of silent conversation was more effective than anything that could be said.

"There are not many people that feel like you," he

said at length; "those that are better off than their neighbours are apt to look as if it sprang from some virtue of theirs. They are more likely to crow over us than to beg our pardon. And just as well too, Markham," he said with a laugh. "If they were all like your mother, they'd cut the ground from under our feet."

"I do not see that," said Paul. "The principle is unaltered, however well-intentioned those may be who are in the position of unjust superiority; that makes no difference so far as I can see."

All the Markham family were roused to attention when Paul spoke. The children looked at him, stopping their private chatter, and Lady Markham cast a wondering, reproachful look at her boy. Was she in a position of unjust superiority because all her children were living, and another parent had lost the half of his? She felt wounded by this strange speech.

"Ah," said Spears, with a twinkle in his eyes, "there is nothing like a recruit from the other side for going the whole——. You have a beautiful family, and you have a beautiful park, my lady. You have got a great deal more than the most of your fellow-creatures have. I can do nothing but stand and wonder at it for my part. Everything you see, everything you touch, is beautiful. You ought to be very sorry for all the others, so many of them, who are not so well off as you."

"Indeed I am, Mr. Spears," said Lady Markham, simply; but then she added, after a pause, "for those who have not the things that give happiness; but there are a great many things that are of no importance to happiness. Everybody, of course, cannot have a beautiful park, as you say, and a nice house; but——"

"Why not?"

"Why not?" She looked up surprised. "Ah, I see! You are all for equality, like Paul."

"Like *Paul*! I taught him everything he knows. He had not an idea on the subject before I opened his eyes to the horrible injustice of the present state of affairs. He is my disciple, and I am his master. Now you know who I am. I cannot be in any house under false pretences," said Spears, pushing his chair a little away from the table.

The children all looked at him aghast; and he had himself the air of having made a great and dangerous revelation, probably to be followed by his dismissal from the house as a dangerous person. "Now you know who I am." The climax was melodramatic in its form; but there was nothing theatrical in it so far as the revolutionary was concerned. He was perfectly sincere. He felt the importance of his own position; and feeling it, could entertain no doubt as to the knowledge of him as their fellest enemy, and the horror of him which must be felt in every house like this throughout the country. He had not wished to come; he had been disappointed to find that Sir William was not there, who (he felt sure) would have refused him admittance. And he would not take advantage of my lady, who was certainly a woman to whom any man might submit himself. Had she rung the bell instantly for her menials to turn him out; had she expressed her horror at the contamination which her family had sustained by sitting down at the same table with him—he would not have been surprised. He pushed his chair gently from the table, and waited to see what she would order; though he was a revolutionary, he had unbounded respect for the mistress of this house.

Lady Markham looked at her strange visitor with bewildered eyes. She made a rapid telegraphic appeal to her son for explanation. "Now you know who I am," but she did not in the least know who he was. He was famous enough in his way, and he thought himself more famous than he was; but Lady Markham had never heard of him. When she saw that no

assistance could be afforded her by her children in this dilemma, she collected her thoughts with a desperate effort. She was one of the women who would rather die than be rude to any one. To speak to a man at her own table, under her own roof, with less than the most perfect courtesy was impossible to her. Besides, she did not really understand what he meant. She was annoyed and affronted that he should speak of her boy as Paul, but in the confusion of the moment that was all her mind took up, and as for openly resenting *that*, how was it possible? One time or another no doubt she would give the stranger a little return blow, a reminder of his over-familiarity, when it could be done with perfect politeness, but not now. She was startled by his solemnity; and it was very clear that he was not a man of what she called "our own class," but Lady Markham's high breeding was above all pettiness.

"Was it really you," she said, "who taught my son (she would not call him Paul again) all the nonsense he has been talking to us? Yes, indeed it is great nonsense, Mr. Spears—you must let me say so. We are doing no one injustice. My husband says all young men are Radicals one time or other; but I should have expected you, a man with children of your own, to know better. Oh no, I don't want to argue. I am not clever enough for that. Let me give you another cup of tea."

The demagogue stared at the beautiful lady as if he could not believe his ears. Partly he was humiliated, seeing that she was not in the least afraid of him, and even did not realise at all what was the terrible disclosure he had made. This gave him that sense of having made himself ridiculous which is so intolerable to those who are unaccustomed to the world. He cast a jealous look round the table to see if he could detect any laughter.

Paul caught him by the arm at this critical moment.

"Eat your breakfast," he said, in a wrathful

undertone. "Do you hear, Spears? Do you think *she* knows? Have some of this fish, for Heaven's sake, and shut up. What on earth do they care if you taught me or not? Do you think she goes into all that?"

Nobody heard this but Harry, who was listening both with ears and eyes. And Mr. Spears returned to his breakfast as commanded. He was abashed, and he was astonished, but still he made a very hearty meal when all was said. And by and by his spirit rose again; in the eyes of this lady, who had so completely got the better of him, far more than if she had turned him out, there was no way of redeeming himself, but by "bringing her over." That would be a triumph. He immediately addressed himself to it with every art at his command. He had an extremely prepossessing and melodious voice, and he spoke with what the ladies thought a kind of old-fashioned grace. The somewhat stiff, stilted phraseology of the self-educated has always more or less a whiff of the formality of an older age. And he made observations which interested them, in spite of themselves. Lady Markham was very polite to her son's friend.

When the children reminded her of her promise to go with them on a long-planned expedition into the woods, she put them off. "You know I cannot leave when I have visitors," she said.

"Perhaps Mr. Spears would come too?" said Alice. And before he knew what was going to happen, he found himself pushed into the front seat of the carriage, which was like a Noah's ark, with hampers and children. Never had this man of the people, this popular orator, occupied so strange a position. He had never known before what it was to roll luxuriously along the roads, to share in the ease and dignity of wealth. He took notes of it, like a man in a foreign country, and observed keenly all that took place—the manners of the people for whom the world was made: that was how

they seemed to take it. The world was made for them. It was not a subject of arrogant satisfaction on their part, or pride in their universal dominion; they took it quite easily, gently, as a matter of course. My lady gave her orders with a gentle confidence in the obedience of everybody she addressed. It was all wonderful to the man who knew only the other side of the question. He asked about everything—the game (with an eye to the poachers); the great extent of the park (as bearing upon one of his favourite points—the abstraction from the public of so many acres which might have cultivation); and was answered with a perfect absence of all sense of guilt, which was very strange to him. They did not know they were doing wrong, these rich people. They told him all about it, simply, smilingly, as if it was the most natural thing in the world. All this went against his preconceived notions, just as the manners of a foreign country so often go against the idea you have formed of them. He had all his senses keenly about him, and yet everything was so novel and surprising that he felt scarcely able to trust to his own impressions. It was the strangest position surely in which a popular agitator, a preacher of democracy and revolution, a special pleader against the rich, ever was.

“We have not many neighbours,” Lady Markham said. “That is Lord Westland’s property beyond the church. You can see Westland Towers from the turn of the road. And there are the Trevors on the other side of the parish.”

“A whole parish,” said Spears, “divided amongst three families.”

“The Trevors have very little,” said Lady Markham, “Sir William is the chief proprietor. But they are a very good family. Admiral Trevor—you must have heard of him—was once a popular hero. He did a great many daring things I have heard, but fame gets forgotten like other things. He lives very quietly now, an old man——”

"The oldest man that ever was," said Alice. "Fancy, it was in Napoleon's time he was so famous—the great Napoleon—before even *old* people were born."

"Before I was born," said Lady Markham, with her soft laugh; "that is something like saying before the Flood. Then there is the vicar, of course, and a few people of less importance. It is easy to go over a country neighbourhood."

"And what do you call the people in all these cottages, my lady? The world was not made for them as it is for you. These would be the neighbours I should think of. When I hear of your three families in the parish, I wonder what all these roofs mean. Are they not flesh and blood too? Don't they live and have things happen to them as well as you fine folks? If they were cleared away out of the place, what would become of your parish, my lady? Could you get on all the same without them that you make no account of them? These are the houses where I should feel at home, among the poor cottagers whom you don't even know about——"

"Mamma—not know about them!" cried Alice. "Why, it is our own village! Do you think because it is a mile away that makes any difference? Why, it is our own village, Mr. Spears."

"I dare say," said the revolutionary—"your own village. Perhaps they pay you rent for suffering them to live there, and allowing them to do all the work of the world and keep everything going——"

"Hush, Alice," said Lady Markham. "Perhaps Mr. Spears does not understand a little country village. They are often not at all fond of doing the work, and they do not much like to pay their rent; but we know them very well for that matter. I could tell you all about them, every house. To be sure we have not the same kind of intercourse with them as with our equals."

"Ah, that is the whole question, Lady Markham.

Pardon me ; I am not your equal, and yet you let me sit in your fine carriage and talk to you. No, I am not a bit humble ; I feel myself the equal of any man. There is nobody in the world whom I will acknowledge my superior—in my dignity as a man."

Lady Markham made him a little bow ; it was her way when she did not know what to say. "One does not need to be told," she said, "that you are a very superior man, Mr. Spears ; quite equal to talk with anybody, were it the greatest philosopher." Here she stopped short in a little embarrassment. "But we are all very simple, ignorant country people," she added with a smile, "about here."

"Ah, you are very clever, my lady. You beg the question."

"Do I ?" said Lady Markham. "I wonder what that means. But now we are just arriving at the place for the pic-nic. When my boy comes up, I will make him take you to the most beautiful point of view. There is a waterfall which we are very proud of, and now when everything is in the first green of spring——Paul !" she cried, "come and get your directions. I want Mr. Spears to see the view."

"Your mother is something I don't understand, Markham," said the demagogue. "I never came across that kind of woman before."

"Didn't you ?" said Paul. He was ready to be taught on other points, but not on this. "You see the bondage we live in," said the young man. "Luxury, people call it ; to me it seems slavery. Oh, to be free of all this folly and finery—to feel one's self a man among men, earning one's bread, shaping one's own life——"

"Ah !——" said Spears, drawing a long breath. He could not be unaffected by what was an echo of his own eloquence. "But there's a deal to say, too, for the other side."

CHAPTER III.

THE Markhams of the Chase were one of the most important families in the county, as has been already intimated. They owned three parts at least of the parish (for my Lord Westland was a new man, who had bought, not inherited, that property, and all that the Trevors had was their house and park and a few fields that did not count), and a great deal more besides. It was generally said that they had risen into importance as a family only at the time of the Commonwealth, but their pedigree extended far beyond that. In the former generation the family had not been fortunate. Sir William Markham himself had been born the third son, and in his youth he had been absent from England, and had "knocked about the world," as people say, in a way which had no doubt enlarged his experiences and made him perhaps more fit for the responsibilities of public life in which he had been so fortunate. He had succeeded, on the death of his second brother, when he was over thirty, and it was not till ten years later that he married.

It had occasioned some surprise in the neighbourhood when Isabel Fleetwood, who was a great beauty, and had made quite a sensation, it was said, in her first season, accepted the middle-aged and extremely sedate and serious little baronet. He was not handsome;—he had no sympathy with the gay life into which she had been plunged by her brother and aunt, who were her only guardians; and the world, always pleased to believe that interested motives are involved, and fond of prophesying badly of a marriage, concluded almost with one voice that it was the ambitious aunt and the extravagant brother who had made it up, and that the poor girl was sacrificed. But this was as great a

mistake as the world ever made. Perhaps it would be wrong to assert that the marriage was a romantic one, and that the beautiful girl under twenty was passionately in love with her little statesman. Perhaps her modest, tranquil disposition, her dislike to the monotonous whirl of fashion, and her sense of the precarious tenure by which she held her position in her brother's house, her only home (he married immediately after she did, as everybody knows, and did not conceal the fact that it was necessary to get rid of his sister before venturing upon a wife), had something to do with her decision. But she had never shown any signs of regretting it through all these years. Sir William was neither young nor handsome, but he was a man whose opinion was listened to wherever it was given, whose voice commanded the attention of the country, whose name was known over Europe. And this in some cases affects a young imagination as much as the finest moustache in the world, or the most distinguished stature. She was not clever, but she was a woman of that gracious nature, courteous, tolerant, and sympathetic, which is more perfect without the sharpness of intellect. Nothing that was unkind was possible to her. She had no particular imagination in the common sense of the word, but she had a higher gift, the moral imagination (so to speak) which gave her an exquisite understanding of other people's feelings, and made her incapable of any injury to them. This made Lady Markham the very ideal of a great lady. As for Sir William, he held his place more firmly than ever with such a partner by his side. They were the happiest couple in the county, as well as the most important. Not only did you meet the best of company at their house, but the sight of a husband and wife so devoted to each other was good for you, everybody said. They were proud of each other, as they had good reason to be: she listened to him as to an oracle, and his tender consideration for her was an example to all. Everything had gone well with the

Markhams. They were rich, and naturally inheritances and legacies and successions of all kinds fell to them, which made them richer. Their children were the healthiest and most thriving children that had ever been seen. Alice promised to be almost as pretty as her mother, and Paul was *not* short like Sir William. Thus fortune had favoured them on every side.

About a year before the date of this history, a cloud—like that famous cloud no bigger than a man's hand—had floated up upon the clear sky, almost too clear in unshadowed well-being, over this prosperous house. It was nothing—a thing which most people would have laughed at, a mere reminder that even the Markhams were not to have everything their own way. It was that Paul, a model boy at school, had suddenly become—wild? Oh no! not wild, that was not the word: indeed it was difficult to know what word to use. He had begun as soon as he went to Oxford by having opinions. He had not been six months there before he was known at the Union and had plunged into all the politico-philosophical questions afloat in that atmosphere of the absolute. This was nothing but what ought to have been in the son of a statesman; but unfortunately to everything his father believed and trusted, Paul took the opposite side. He took up the highest republican principles, the most absolute views as to the equality of the human race. That, though it somewhat horrified his mother and sister, produced at first very little effect upon Sir William, who laughed and informed his family that Johnny Shotover had held precisely the same views when he was an undergraduate, though now he was Lord Rightabout's secretary and as sound a politician as it was possible to desire. "It is the same as the measles," Sir William said. Paul, however, had a theoretical mind and an obstinate temper: he was too logical for life. As soon as he had come to the conviction that all men are equal, he took the further step which costs a great deal more, and decided that there

ought to be equality of property as well as of right. This made Sir William half angry, though it amused him. He bade his son not to be a fool.

"What would become of you," he cried, "you young idiot!" using language not at all parliamentary, "if there was a re-distribution of property? How much do you think would fall to your share?"

"As much as I have any right to, sir," the young revolutionary said.

And then Lady Markham interposed, and assured Paul that he was talking nonsense.

"Why should you take such foolish notions into your head? No one of your family ever did so before. And can you really imagine," she asked with gentle severity, "that you are a better judge of such matters than your papa?" but neither did this powerful argument convince the unreasonable boy.

There was one member of the family, however, who was affected by Paul's arguments, and this was his sister. Alice was dazzled at once by the magnanimity of his sentiments and by his eloquence. Altogether independent of this, she was, as a matter of course, his natural partisan and defender, always standing up for Paul, with a noble disregard for the right or the wrong in question, which is a characteristic of girls and sisters. (For, Alice justly argued, if he was wrong, he had all the more need for some one to stand up for him.) But in this case her mind was, if not convinced, at least dazzled and imposed upon by the grandeur of this new way of thinking. She would not admit it to Paul, and indeed maintained with him a pretence of serious opposition, arguing very feebly for the most part, though sometimes dealing now and then, all unaware of its weight, a sudden blow under which the adversary staggered, and in the success of which Alice rejoiced without seeing very clearly how it was that one argument should tell so much more than another. But at heart she was profoundly touched by the generosity and

nobleness of her brother's views. Such a sweeping revolution would not be pleasant. To be brought down from her own delightful place, to be no longer Miss Markham of the Chase, but only a little girl on the same level with her maid, was a thing she could not endure to think of, and which brought the indignant blood to her cheek. "*That* you could never do," she cried; "you might take away our money, but you could never make gentlefolk into common people." This was one of the hits which found out a joint in Paul's armour, but unaware of that Alice went on still more confidently. "You *know* good blood makes all the difference—you cannot take that from us. People who have ancestors as we have can never be made into nobodies." At which her brother scoffed and laughed, and bade her remember that old Brown had quite as many grandfathers as they, and was descended from Adam as certainly as the Queen was. "And Harry Fleetwood," said this defiler of his own nest, "do you call him an example of the excellence of blood?" Poor Alice was inclined to cry when her disreputable cousin was thus thrown in her teeth. She clung to her flag and fought for her caste like a little heroine. But when Paul was gone, she owed to her mother that there was a great deal in what he said. It was very noble as Paul stated it. When he asked with lofty indignation, "What have I done to deserve all I have got? I have taken the trouble to be born,"—Alice felt in her heart that there was no answer to this plea.

"My dear," Lady Markham said, "think how foolish it all is; does he know better than your papa and all the men that have considered the subject before him?"

"It may be silly," said Alice, changing her argument, "but it is very different from other young men. They all seem to think the world was made for them; and if Paul is wrong, it is finer than being right like *that*."

This was a fanciful plea which moved Lady Markham,

and to which she could make no reply. She shook her head and repeated her remark about Paul's presumption in thinking himself wiser than papa; but she too was affected by the generosity and magnanimity which seemed the leading influences of the creed so warmly adopted by her boy.

This was the state of semi-warfare, not serious enough to have caused real pain, but yet a little disquieting in respect to Paul's future, when the event occurred which has been recorded in the two last chapters. The ladies saw more of the strange companion whom Paul had brought with him than they generally saw of ordinary visitors. He had no letters to write, nor calls to make, nor private occupations of any kind; neither had he sufficient understanding of the rules of society to know that guests are expected to amuse themselves, and not to oppress with their perpetual presence the ladies of the house. What he wanted, being as it were a traveller in an undiscovered country, was to study the ways of the house, and the women of it, and the manner of their life. And as he was so original as not to know anybody they knew, Lady Markham in her politeness was led to invent all kinds of subjects of conversation, upon which, without exception, Mr. Spears found something to say. He assailed them on all points with the utmost frankness. He sat (on the edge of his chair) and watched Lady Markham at her worsted work, and found fault even with that.

"You spend a great deal of time over it," he said; "and what do you mean to do with it?"

This was the second evening, and they had become quite accustomed to Spears.

"I am not quite sure, to tell the truth. It is for a cushion—probably I shall put it on that sofa, or it will do for a window-seat somewhere, or——"

"There are three cushions on the sofa already, and all the window-seats are as soft as down-beds. You are doing something that will not be of any use when it is

done, and that, excuse me, is not very pretty, and takes up a great deal of your time."

"Show Mr. Spears your work, Alice; he will like that better. Everybody is severe now upon these poor abandoned Berlin wools. Now, Mr. Spears, that pattern came from the School of Art Needlework. It was drawn by somebody very distinguished indeed. It is intended to elevate the mind as well as to occupy the fingers. You cannot but be pleased with that."

"What is it for?" said the critic.

"I—scarcely know; for a screen I think—part of a screen you know, Mr. Spears, to keep off the fire——"

"Ah!—no, I don't know. Among the people I belong to, Miss Alice, there is no need of expedients to keep off the fire. Sometimes there is no fire to have even a look at. I've known poor creatures wandering into the streets when the gas was lighted, because it was warm there. The gas in the shop-windows was all the fire they had a chance of. Did you ever see a little wretched room all black of a winter's night? Black—there's no blackness like that; it is blacker than the crape you all put on when your people die."

"No; she has never seen it," cried Lady Markham. "I did once in our village at home before I was married. Oh, Mr. Spears, I know! it made me cold for years after. No, thank God, Alice has never seen it. We take care there is nothing like that here——. But," she added after a pause—"I don't like to say anything unkind; but, Mr. Spears, after all, it was their own fault."

"Ah, my lady! you that make screens to keep off the fire, do you never do what is wrong? you that are cushioned at every angle, and never know what a hard seat is, or a hard bed, or a harsh look, or a nip of frost, or a pinch of hunger—do you always do what is right? You ought to. You are like angels, with everything beautiful round you; and you look like angels, and you ought to be what they are said to be; but, if instead of

all this pretty nonsense you had misery and toil around you, and ugliness, and discord, and quarrelling, would it be wonderful if you went astray sometimes, and gave the other people, the warm, wealthy, well-clothed people, reason to say it was your own fault? Great God!" cried the orator, jumping up. "Why should we be sitting here in this luxury, with everything that caprice can want, and waste our lives working impossible flowers upon linen rags, while they are starving, and perishing, and sinning for want, trying for the hardest work, and not getting it? Why should there be such differences in life?"

"This is not a place to ask such a question, Spears," said Paul. "You forget that we are the very people who are taking the bread out of the mouths of our brothers. We, and such as we——"

"Hold your tongue, Markham," said the orator. "Do you think it is as easy as that? Don't take any notice of him, my lady. He's young, and he knows no better. He thinks that if he were able to give up all your estates to the people, justice would be done. That is all he knows. Stuff! we could do it all by a rising if it were as easy as that. You young ass," the man continued, filling the ladies with resentment more warm than when he had denounced them all, "don't you see it's a deal better in the hands of your father and mother, that take some thought of the people, than with a beast of a shoddy millionaire, who cares for nothing on this earth but money? I beg your pardon," he added, with a smile, "for introducing such a subject at all; but sometimes it gets too much for me. I remember the things I've seen. I would not treat lilies in that way, Miss Alice, if I were putting them on wood."

"Oh!" cried Alice with tears in her eyes; "how can you care about a pattern after what you have been saying?" His eloquence had moved her so much that she felt disposed to fling her pattern away. "What can one do? How can one help it?" she said, below

her breath, appealing to him with her heart in her eyes.

"I don't like the pattern," said Spears. "If I were going to put it on wood, I'd treat it so—and so." To illustrate his meaning, he made lines with his thumb nail upon her satin. "I'd turn the leaves this way, and the bud so. They should not be so stiff—or else they should be stiffer."

"They are conventionally treated, Mr. Spears," said Lady Markham, "and you don't treat anything conventionally, neither our patterns nor your friends."

She had not forgotten that he had called her son Paul, and "you young ass" was still tingling in her ears. Paul took it, however, with the greatest composure as a matter of course.

Spears burst into a great good-humoured laugh.

"I beg your pardon, my lady. We don't mind how we talk to young fellows. I'd have it as conventional, or more, Miss Alice. This falls between two stools. The lily's a glorious thing when you enter into it. Look at the ribs of it, as strong as steel, though they are all sheathed in something smoother than satin. And every curl of the petal is full of vigour and life. I used to think till you drew it or carved it, you never could understand what that means—'Consider the lilies of the field.' There they stand, nobody taking any trouble about them, and come out of the earth built like a tower, or a ship, anything that's strong and full of grand curves and sweeping lines. Now the fault I find with *that* is, that you never would come to understand it a bit better if you worked a hundred of them. If I had a knife and a bit of wood——"

"Do you carve wood, Mr. Spears?"

"Do I carve wood?" he laughed as Lord Lytton might have laughed had he been asked whether he wrote novels. Did not all the world know it? The ignorance of this pretty little lady was not insulting but amusing, showing how far she was out of the world, and

how little in this silent country house they knew what was going on. "Yes—a little," he said, with again a laugh. It tickled him. Her mother had not known who Spears was—Spears the orator—the reformer—the enemy of her order—and now here was this girl who asked with that inimitable innocence, "Do you carve wood?" He was amused beyond measure. "But I could not bring a lily like that out of the softest deal," he said; "it would break its back and lie flat—it has no anatomy. If I had a pencil——"

Alice, who was full of curiosity and interest, here put the desired pencil into his hand, and he sat down at the nearest table, and with many contortions of his limbs and contractions of his lips, as if all his body was drawing, produced in bold black lines a tall lily with a twist of bindweed hanging about its lovely powerful stalk, like strength and weakness combined. "That is as near nature as you can do it without seeing it," he said, pleased with the admiration his drawing called forth. "But if I were to treat it conventionally, I'd split the lily, and lay it flat, without light and shadow at all. I should not make a thing which is neither one nor the other, like your pattern there."

This was the way in which the man talked, assailing them on every side, interesting them, making them angry, keeping them in commotion and amusement. Lady Markham said that it had never cost her so much to be civil to any one; but she was very civil to him, polite, and sometimes even gracious. He stayed three days, and though she uttered a heartfelt thanksgiving when the dog-cart in which Paul drove him to the railway disappeared down the avenue, "Thank heaven he is gone, and your papa only comes back to-morrow!" Lady Markham herself did not deny their strange visitor justice. "But," she said, "now he is gone, let as little as possible be said about him. I do not want to conceal anything from your papa, but I am sure he will not be pleased when he hears of it. For Paul's

sake, let as little as possible be said. I will mention it, of course, but I will not dwell upon it. It is much better that little should be said."

CHAPTER IV.

SIR WILLIAM did not come home for two days, but when he did return there was a line between his eyebrows which everybody knew did not come there for nothing. The first glimpse of him made the whole family certain *that he knew*: and that he was angry; but he did not say anything until dinner was over and the children gone to bed. By that time the ladies began to hope with trembling, either that they had been mistaken, or that nothing was going to be said. "I will tell him this evening, but I will choose my time," Lady Markham whispered to Alice as Sir William stood up in front of the fireplace and took his coffee after dinner. He was not a man who sat long after dinner, and he liked to have his coffee in the drawing-room, when all the boys and girls had said good-night. He was a little man of very neat and precise appearance, always carefully dressed, always dignified and stately. Perhaps this had been put on at first as a necessary balance to his insignificant stature; but it was part of himself now. His family could not but look up to a man who so thoroughly respected himself. He had a fine head, with abundant hair, though it was growing white, and very penetrating, keen blue eyes; but to see him standing thus against the carved marble of the mantelpiece with the faint glimmer of an unnecessary fire throwing up now and then a feeble flash behind him, it was not difficult to understand that his family were afraid of his displeasure. The conversation they maintained was of the most feeble, disjointed

description, while he stood there not saying a word. Paul stood about too, helplessly, as men do in a drawing-room, unoccupied, and prepared to resent anything that might be said to him. If only he could be got away Lady Markham felt that she would have courage to dare everything, and tell her husband, as was her wont, all that had occurred since he went away.

"The Westlands called on Tuesday. They were not more amusing than usual. He wanted to tell you of some great discovery he has made about the state of the law. Paul, will you go and fetch me that law-book I told you of, out of the library? I want to show something in it to papa."

"I don't know what you mean by a law-book," said Paul. He saw that it was intended as a pretext to send him away, and he would not budge.

"And I had a long talk with the vicar about the new cottages. He thinks only those should be allowed to get them who have been very well behaved in the old ones. Paul, by the way, that reminds me I promised to send down the Mudie books to the vicarage. Will you go and see after them, and tell Brown to send them away?"

"Presently," said Paul. He drank his coffee with the most elaborate tediousness. The more his mother tried to get rid of him, the more determined he was not to go.

"Except the vicar and the Westlands we have seen—scarcely anybody. But I want those books to go to-night, Paul."

"You are very anxious to get Paul out of the way," said Sir William. "What does 'scarcely anybody' mean? Is it true that a man called Spears, a trades-unionist, a paid agitator——?"

"He is nothing of the sort," said Paul, with a sudden burst of passion. "If he is an agitator, it is for the right against the wrong, not for payment; anybody who knows him will tell you so."

"I have heard it from people who know him," said Sir William. "Is it possible that you took advantage of my absence, Paul, to bring such a man here—to lodge such a person in my house?"

"Such a person!" Paul, who had felt it coming ever since his father's arrival, stood to his arms at once. "He is the best man I know," he said, indignantly. "There is no house in the country that might not be proud to receive him; and as for taking advantage of your absence, sir——"

"Indeed," said Lady Markham, holding up her head, though she had grown pale, "you must not say so, William; he did not know you were away; and as for Mr. Spears, I was just about to tell you. He is not a man to be afraid of. It is true he is not—in society, perhaps—he has not quite the air of a person in society—has he, Alice?" This was said with scarcely a tremble. "But his manners were perfectly good, and his appearance, though it was quite simple—I think you must be making some mistake. I saw no harm in him."

Will it be believed that Paul, instead of showing gratitude, was indignant at this mild approval? "Saw no harm in him," he cried; "his manners, his appearance! Are you mad, mother? He is a man who is worthy to be a king, if merit made kings; or if any man worth the name would accept an office which has been soiled by such ignoble use!"

"Hold your tongue, sir," said Sir William. "It is you who are mad. A stump-orator, a fellow who does much mischief in England! My house is not to be made a shelter for such *canaille*. Your mother should have turned him to the door; and so she would have done, I don't doubt—her instincts are too fine not to have seen the kind of creature he was—but for her foolish devotion to you."

"Paul, Paul! Oh, don't speak—don't say anything," cried Alice in an agony, in her brother's ear.

"Let him say what he pleases," said Sir William. "This must be put a stop to. When the house is his, he can dishonour it if he likes, but in the meantime the house is mine."

"Certainly the house is yours, sir," cried his son; "I make no claim on it. I feel no right to it. Let me alone, Alice! Do I want the house, or the land, or the money which we steal from the poor to make ourselves splendid, while our fellow-creatures are starving? I am ready to give it up at a moment's notice. It wounds my conscience, it restrains my action. I want nothing with your house, sir. If I may not bring one honest man into it, you may hand it over to any one you please; it is no home for me."

"Paul, Paul!" cried his mother in tones of alarm. Sir William only laughed that laugh of anger which frightens a household.

"Let him rave—let him rave," he cried, throwing himself into a chair. "A boy who speaks so of his home does not deserve one. He does not deserve the position Providence has given him—a good name, a good fortune, honourable ancestors, all thrown away."

"I acknowledge no honour in the ancestors that robbed the poor to make me rich," cried the hot-headed youth. And the end of all was that his mother and sister had much ado to keep him from leaving the house at once, late as it was, in the heat of passion. Never before had such a storm—or indeed any storm at all—arisen in the peaceful house. It marked the ending of that idyllic age in which the rulers of a family are supreme, and where no new-developed will confronts them within their sacred walls. Raised voices and faces aglow with anger are terrible things in such an inclosure. It seemed to Lady Markham that she would die with shame when she met the look of subdued wonder, curiosity, and sympathy in old Brown's eyes; when, after the storm was over, after a decent interval, he came in, taking great precautions

to make himself audible as he approached. It was the first time since she entered the house that her servants had occasion to be sorry for Lady Markham, and this consciousness went to her heart. By the time Brown came in, however, all was very quiet. Sir William had gone away to his library, and Paul, breathing indignation at every pore, was walking about the room with his hands in his pockets, now and then launching an arrow at his mother or sister. A truce had been patched up. He had consented, as a great matter, not to plunge out of the house into the darkness, but to wait till to-morrow. This was a concession for which they were as grateful as if it had been the noblest gift; it was for their sake he did it; nothing else, he declared, would have made him remain an hour under the same roof.

"Oh hush, Paul—hush! I forbid you to say another word," cried his mother; and then all was silent, as they heard Brown cough before he opened the door.

"Tell Lewis to have the dog-cart ready for Mr. Markham for the first train," she said, not raising her eyes. But all the same she saw the pity in the face of old Brown. He asked no question; he did not express his sorrow to hear of Mr. Markham's sudden departure, as on previous occasions he would have done, exercising the right of his old service; he said, "Certainly, my lady," in a tone which went to Lady Markham's heart. Even Brown perceived that there was no more to be said.

That was in other ways a notable year for the Markhams. For one thing Alice "came out." She was eighteen: she had not been prematurely introduced as an eldest daughter very often is. And in consequence Lady Markham stayed in London longer and went more into society. This moment, so exciting to the *débutante*, was clouded over to Alice and to her mother by the fact that Paul was in disgrace. They were still in London when the Oxford term ended, and it had been their hope

that he would join them there. It is true that this prospect was not altogether an unmingled delight, for a certain alarm was involved in their joy. How would his father and he "get on" after this first quarrel? Would Paul be as submissive, would Sir William be as forgiving, as they ought? All the little triumphs of Alice, her *succès*, the admiration she had excited were made of no account by this doubt and fear about her brother. But when, just before the long vacation began, a letter arrived from Paul, announcing that he did not mean to join them at all, but was going to "stay up and read," with a party of other "men" who entertained that virtuous intention, the revulsion of feeling in the minds of the mother and sister was very painful. They forgot that they had ever entertained any fear about his coming, and cried over his letter with the bitterest pangs of disappointment.

"It is all papa's fault," Alice cried in mournful wrath; and though Lady Markham checked her daughter, saying, "Hush! surely your papa knows better than you do," yet there was a little rebellion in her heart too against the head of the house. Had he been less hard, Paul would have been more docile.

Sir William, however, as it happened, was rather mollified than offended by this intimation. The authorities of Paul's college had been finding fault. High hopes had been entertained of the young man at first. It had been believed that he would bring distinction to his college, which, who can doubt? is the first thing to be considered. But that hope had proved delusive; he had not "gone in for" half so much as he ought, and of all those things he had "gone in for" he had not been successful in one. This made him to be looked upon coldly by eyes which at first winked with benevolence at the blunders and idleness of a statesman's son. Now that they were aware that he was not likely to bring them any honour, the dons grew querulous with Paul. He was not a duke or a duke's son that he should ride

roughshod over the habitudes of the university and its inviolable order. They had not of late shown that delight in him which parents love to see. He had not excited parental feelings in their academical bosoms. He was visionary, he was Radical; and it was whispered that he received visitors in his rooms who were not of a character to be received there. Fortunately this last accusation had not reached Lady Markham's ears. Had she known, how could she ever have borne that "staying up to read," which at present seemed a proof of Paul's innate virtue? But Sir William was of tougher fibre. He was not displeased to be free of personal contact with his son at this crisis. It is not expedient that there should be quarrels in a family. All that nonsense would blow over. Paul's intellectual measles might be severe, but they were only measles after all, a malady of youth which a young man of marked character took more seriously than a frivolous boy, but which would pass away. "It will be all the better for his degree," his father said with that simplicity of confidence in the noble purpose of "staying up to read" which it is so touching to see. And what could the women say? If it was good for him, was it their part to complain? They were cruelly disappointed, and yet perhaps they were relieved as well. They wrote letters full of the former feeling, but they did not say anything about the latter—not even to each other. How could they allow even to themselves that it was better for Paul to stay away?

However this disappointment seriously interfered with the glories of her first season to Alice. She did not wish to stay longer in town than Lady Markham's usual time. She longed for the country, when the summer reached its very crown of brightness, and the park looked baked and the streets scorching. They went home as they were in the habit of doing, in the end of June, leaving Sir William to toil through the end of the session by himself; and though it was still more

melancholy to be without Paul in the quietness of home, yet there were compensations. They had their usual work to occupy them, and that routine of ordinary living which is the best prop and support of the anxious mind; and Alice was young enough, and her mother scarcely too old to forget, by times altogether, that there were troubles in the world. Nothing very dreadful had happened after all. If Paul did not write very often, were not all boys the same? Thus they kept their anxieties subdued, and were not unhappy—except perhaps for half an hour now and then.

Thus the summer went on. The holidays came once more. The boys came home, the girls were delivered from their governess, and the reign of innocence recommenced. Not to last long this time, for everybody knew that in the second week in August papa was coming home. The children, however, took the good of the fortnight they had all to themselves. The sunshine, the harvest, the woods, how delightful they are in August, with no lessons, no governess, and mamma all to themselves! From morning till night the house was full of laughter and commotion, except when it lay all open and silent with the whole family out of it, gone pic-nicking, gone upon excursions, making simple holiday.

"My lady is the biggest baby of them all," Mrs. Fry said with indulgent disapproval, shaking her head, "if she wasn't thinking all the time of Mr. Paul."

"Bless you there ain't a minute as that boy is out of her head," said Brown. Brown was too respectful to say anything but Mr. Markham in public, but he said Mr. Paul, or even Paul *tout court*, when he was in the housekeeper's room. While these pranks were going on, the house lay like an enchanted palace, all its doors and windows open to the sweet summer air, the rooms full of flowers and sweetness, but nobody there. There were too many servants about for any fear of robbers, but it is doubtful whether Sir William would have

thought it decorous had he seen the openness and vacancy of this summer palace, waiting all garnished and bright for the return of the revellers, for the rush of light feet, the smiles, the voices, the chattering and laughter, the gaiety and glee that in a moment would flood it through and through. But to the spectator whose dignity was not involved, these changes were pretty and pleasant to see, and it was not to be wondered at perhaps if Brown and the army under his charge took holiday too.

One day very shortly before that on which Sir William was expected, a stranger walked slowly up the avenue and came to the great open door. Everything was open as usual. He saw into the great hall as he came gradually up, and saw that it was empty and still. It was a warm day, and he was weighted with a little valise, which he carried, shifting it from one hand to the other with some appearance of fatigue. He was a tall man, very thin and very brown, with the unmistakable look of an old soldier in his well-squared shoulders, even though his figure drooped a little with fatigue and heat, and slightly with age. When he reached the door, he looked round him, and seeing nobody there went in and placed himself in a great chair which was near the open door. "He's come into my house without knocking many's the day," he said to himself. It was hot, and he was tired, and the coolness and shade inside completed what the glare without had done. He put his valise down by his side and leaned back, and felt himself very comfortable; then quite tranquilly and pleasantly closed his eyes and rested; had there been anything to drink all would have been perfect. But even without this it was very comfortable. The house was perfectly still, but outside a little breeze was getting up, making a murmuring cadence among the trees. There was a sound of bees in the air close at hand, and of birds further off among the branches—everything was sweet and summery and reposeful. The

new-comer lay back in his chair in the mood which makes fatigue an accessory of enjoyment. Something of the vagabond was in his appearance which yet scarcely marred his air of gentleman. Poor he was without doubt, growing old, very tired, dusty, and travel-worn. He was not fastidious about his accommodation, and could have slept as well on a grassy bank, had it been needful, but the chair was very comfortable and pleasant. He fell asleep, or rather went to sleep, quite voluntarily. It was afternoon, near the time when the party might be expected to return, but up to this moment nobody had made any preparation for them, and the new-comer took possession without challenge of all the comfort of the vacant place.

Roland had been allowed that day to drive the dog-cart, the carriage being full, and he and Marie had so urged the stout cob Primrose, which was the steed specially given up to the uses of the schoolroom, that he flew like the wind and got home before the carriage. The little pair burst into the stable-yard like a flash of lightning, and tossed the reins to the first astonished groom they encountered.

"Let's rush in the back way and pretend we have been here for an hour," cried Marie.

They flew rather than walked round by the flower-garden, and through the open window of the drawing-room. There was the carriage turning in at the gate, a quarter of a mile off; there was plenty of time. But the fact that there was plenty of time did not make them move quietly. They proceeded into the hall, making themselves audible by the chatter of their childish voices and laughter.

"Won't mamma be surprised!" cried Marie.

But, on the contrary, it was herself that was surprised. She gave a lengthened "Oh!" of wonder, alarm, and consternation, as they came in sight of the stranger in the hall. She turned round and clutched at Roland, and like a little coward put him first. He was twelve,

not an age to be frightened, and Marie was but eleven. Roland said "Oh!" too, but with a different tone, and, dropping back a little upon her, confronted and gazed at the sleeper in the easy chair. His looks were not of the kind that children fly. The heavy moustache drooping over his mouth seemed to add to the appearance of complete, yet pleasant weariness, in which the shabby figure was wrapped. Here was a thing to encounter when one got home: a man, a gentleman, whom one had never seen before, fast asleep in the great chair in the hall!

"Will he not wake?" whispered Marie. "Oh, Roland! are you frightened? Shall I run and tell Brown?"

"Frightened!—likely," said Roland; but he kept hold of her frock, not that she could have been of any real assistance to him, but "for company."

The two children stood transfixed before this strange apparition, watching if he would move. At the first stir, Marie most likely would have run away with a shriek; but after all what was there to fear? Mamma had certainly turned into the avenue, and might arrive any moment, and Brown with his army of men and maids was somewhere in the background within call, so there was no real reason to fear. Nevertheless, when the arms that rested on the arms of the chair began to stretch themselves, and the intent gaze of the children drew the tired eyes open, Marie's best efforts to command herself could not restrain a tremulous cry, which quite completed the stranger's awakening.

"Bless me, I've been asleep!" he said, opening his eyes. Then when he saw the two little figures before him, his eyelids opened wider, and a smile came out from underneath them. "Little folks, who are you?"

"It's you to tell us," cried Roland with spirit. "This is our house, but it isn't yours."

"That's true, my little man. I've been asleep, more shame to me. It was hot, and I've had a long walk."

"If you are very tired, poor gentleman," said Marie, coming in now that there seemed nothing to be afraid of, "I—don't think mamma will mind. Oh, Rol, here she is! come and tell her," the little girl cried. They forgot their triumph of being first, in the excitement of this strange piece of news, and flew bursting with it to the door of the carriage which swept up at the moment, filling the stillness with echoes, and waking up the whole silent house. Brown and the footman on duty appeared as by magic, and the whole enchanted palace came to life. The stranger sat still and watched it all with a smile on his face. He saw pretty Alice and her beautiful mother descend from the carriage, and a curious light broke over his countenance.

"Lucky little beggar," he said.

He repeated this phrase two or three times to himself before he was altogether roused from the half-dream, half-languor, he was still in, by the sight of Lady Markham's eyes fixed upon him, and the alarmed, guilty, nervous inspection of old Brown.

"You must get out of here, sir—you must get out of here, sir—heaven knows how you got into it; this must have been your fault, Charles. I can't let you stay here, though I don't want to be uncivil. My lady's coming this way."

"It's your lady I want, my friend," said the intruder, rising languidly. He made Lady Markham a fine bow as she approached, with surprise in her face. "I must be my own godfather, and present myself to my old friend's family," he said. "I am Colonel Lenny, of the 50th West India Regiment. St. John Lenny at your service, my dear madam, once Will Markham's closest friend."

Lady Markham made him a curtsy in return for his bow.

"Sir William is not at home," she said. If she had not already suffered for her hospitality, his reception would have been less cold; but she had

never heard of Colonel Lenny, and what could she say?

"He must have talked to you about me and mine. I married a Gaveston—Katey. You must have heard him speak of her. No? That is very strange. Then perhaps you will think me an intruder, my Lady Markham. I beg your pardon. I thought I was sure of a welcome; and I was so done with the heat, though I used not to mind the heat, that I fell asleep in your nice, pleasant hall, in this big chair."

Lady Markham inclined her head in assent. What was she to do? who was Colonel Lenny? She cast a glance at Alice, seeking counsel; but how could Alice advise?

"Will you come in now and take a cup of tea with us?" she said.

CHAPTER V.

COLONEL LENNY left his valise in the hall, where, when he rose, it was very visible, a dusty object upon the soft carpet. Lady Markham looked at it with alarm. Did it mean that he intended to stay? Was she to be punished for having received one unsuitable visitor by being forced to be rude to another? She led the way into the drawing-room in great perplexity and trouble. As for Brown and Charles, they both went and looked at the valise with curiosity as a natural phenomenon.

"Is all the beggars coming on visits?" said the footman; "I ain't agoing to wait on another, not if my wages was doubled."

"Hold your tongue," said Brown; "you'll do what I tell you if you want to go from here with a character. So mind your business, and keep your silly remarks to yourself."

But when Charles disappeared muttering, Brown turned over the dusty, humble portmanteau with his foot, with serious disgust. "My lady hasn't the heart to say no to nobody," he said to himself. He felt perfectly convinced that this miserable representation of a gentleman's luggage would sooner or later have to be carried upstairs.

The stranger followed Lady Markham into the drawing-room, at which he gazed with wonder and admiration. "This is something like a house," he said. "Little we thought when I used to know Will Markham that he would ever come to this honour and glory. It was in the year—bless me, not any year you can recollect—forty years ago if it is a day. His brothers were living, and he was nearly as poor as the rest of us. I married Katey. He must have spoken of the Gavestons, though he might not mention his old friend Lenny. Ah, well, maybe no—to be sure I am not taking everything into consideration. Did your father ever tell you, my boys, of the West Indies, and the insurrection, and all the stirring times we had there?"

Harry and Roland looked at each other with eyes brightening, yet confused. Papa was not a man who told stories of anything,—and Lady Markham interposed. "I think you must be making a mistake," she said. "I am sure Sir William has never been in the West Indies. You must be thinking of some one else of the same name."

The old soldier looked at her with bewildered surprise. "A mistake!" he said. "*I* make a mistake about Will Markham? I have known all about him, and the name of his place, his family, and all his belongings for the last forty years! Why, I—I am his——" Then he paused and looked at Lady Markham, and added slowly, "One of his very oldest friends, be the other who he may."

"I beg your pardon," she said, concealing her embarrassment over the tea-table.

Colonel Lenny was not particularly fond of tea : he would have liked, he thought, something else instead of it, something that foamed and sparkled ; yet the tea was better than nothing. He gave her his pardon very easily, not dwelling upon the offence.

"Ah," he said, "I can tell you stories that will make your hair stand on end. When those niggers broke out, it was not preaching that would do much. That was in the old time, you know, when land meant something in the islands, before emancipation. Did you ever hear about the emancipation ? I'll tell you a story about the times before that. We had to get the women and children stowed away—the devils would have thought no more of cutting them to pieces—we were after them in the woods night and day sometimes. Once your father was with us—he was not in the service, as we were, but he was very plucky though he was always small—he joined as a volunteer."

"Where was that ? and when was that ?" cried the boys ; and the girls too drew near, much attracted by the promise of a story. Colonel Lenny waved his long brown hand to them, and went on—

"I'll tell you all about that presently ; but I must ask you to let me know, my dear lady, when Markham is expected home. I've got business to talk over—business that is more his than mine. He'll know all about it as soon as he hears my name. It is a long time since we met—and perhaps the notion would never have struck me to seek him out but for—things that have happened. It is more his business than mine."

"I am not sure whether he will return to-morrow or next day—next day at the latest," said Lady Markham, faltering.

She could not make up her mind what to do. On the occasion of her former mistake, Paul in person had been present to answer for his friend, but there was no one to guarantee this second stranger—this new

claimant on her hospitality. If he should be an impostor! but he did not look like an impostor; or, if it should be a mistake after all, and his Will Markham quite a different man? Will Markham! it seemed incredible to Lady Markham that any one should ever have addressed her husband with so much familiarity. These, and a hundred other thoughts, ran through her mind as she poured out the tea.

Meantime, Colonel Lenny made great friends with the children. He began to tell them the most exciting stories. He was not ill at ease as Spears had been, but sat luxuriously thrown back into a luxurious chair, his long limbs stretched out, his long brown hands giving animation to his narrative. Lady Markham managed to escape while this was going on, and got *Burke* down from the bookshelves in the hall, and anxiously looked up its various lists. There was no Sir William Markham except her husband, no William Markham at all among the county gentry. When Brown, become suspicious by his past experiences, came into the hall at the sound of her foot, she put back the book again guiltily.

The old butler came forward with an expression of concern and trouble on his countenance. "What does your ladyship intend," he asked, solemnly, "that I should do with this?" touching with his foot as he spoke the dusty valise—the old soldier's luggage, which lay very humbly as if ashamed of itself half under the big chair.

Lady Markham could have laughed and she could have cried. "I don't know what to do, Brown," she said.

Brown was very much tempted to give his mistress the benefit of his advice. He forbore, however, exercising a wise discretion, for Lady Markham, though very gracious, was proud; but he was not self-denying enough to divest himself of a general air of anxiety—the air of one who could say a great deal if he would—shaking his head slightly, and looking at the offending

article which seemed to try to withdraw itself out of notice under the shadow of the chair. He could have said a great deal if he had dared. He would have bidden his mistress beware who she took into her house, Sir William wasn't best pleased before, and if it happens again—— Perhaps Lady Markham read something of this in Brown's eyes; and she did not like the butler's advice, which was more or less disapproval, as all effective advice is. The result was however that before dinner the poor little valise was carried up, to the great scorn of the domestics, to a bedroom, and that Colonel Lenny, after keeping the children suspended on his lips all the evening, withdrew early, leaving the mother and daughter to an anxious consultation over him. Alice, too, had consulted a book, but it was an *Army List* that was the subject of her studies. She came to her mother triumphantly with this volume open in her hand.

"Here he is, mamma. John St. John Lenny, 50th West India Regiment. I am so glad I have found it. He is delightful. There never could be any doubt about such a thorough old soldier."

"You thought Mr. Spears interesting, Alice," said Lady Markham, feebly.

"Mamma! and so did you. He was very interesting. I have his lily that he drew for me, and it is beautiful. But he was not a gentleman. He did not know how to sit on his chair, nor how to stand, nor what to say to you or even me. He called me Miss Alice, and you my lady. But Colonel Lenny is entirely different. He is just the same as everybody else, only more amusing than most people. Did you hear the story he was telling about——?"

"Oh, my dear, I was a great deal too anxious to be able to attend to any story. What if he should turn out some agitator too? what if he were a spy to see what kind of life we lead, or an impostor, or some one who has made a mistake, and takes your papa for some

other Markham? If I have taken in some one else whom I ought not to have taken in, I think I shall die of shame."

"How can he be an impostor, when he is here in the *Army List*?"

"Let me see it," Lady Markham said. She read out the name word by word, and her mind was a little relieved. "I suppose there cannot be any mistake since he is here," she said, with a sigh of relief. But, as a matter of fact, Lady Markham sat up in her dressing-gown half the night, afraid of she knew not what, and listening anxiously to all the vague mystical noises that arise in a sleeping house in the middle of the night. She did not know what it was of which she was afraid. How could he be an impostor when his name was in the *Army List*, and when he had that kind brown face? But then, on the other hand, a man from the West Indies, who called her husband Will Markham, was an incredible person. She sat up till the blue summer daylight came silently in at all the windows, putting her suspicious candles to shame, when she, too, became ashamed of herself for her suspicions, and crept very quietly to bed.

Sir William did not come next day, but Colonel Lenny stayed on, and as it is always the *premier pas que coûte*, Lady Markham's doubts were lulled to rest, and she neither frowned nor watched the second night. And on the third Sir William came. It was Alice who went to meet him at the station, in a pretty little pony carriage which he had given her. Everything was done instinctively by the ladies to disarm any displeasure papa might feel, and to prepare him to receive this second visitor with a friendly countenance. If there was anything that moved Sir William's heart with a momentary impulse of unreasoning pride and foolish fondness, it was supposed by his wife to be the sight of his pretty daughter, with her pretty ponies. These ponies had been named To-to and Ta-ta before Alice

had them—after, it was understood, two naughty personages in a play—and as the ponies were very naughty the names were retained. There were no such mischievous and troublesome individuals about the house, and Alice was very proud of the fact that it was she with her light hand who managed them best. Sir William was not fond of wild animals, and yet all the household knew that he liked to be brought home by his daughter in her little carriage, with the ponies skimming over the roads as if they were flying. It was the one piece of dash and daring in which he delighted.

Lady Markham, who was not fond of risking her daughter, came out to the door to entreat her to take care.

"And you will explain everything?" she said; "how it happened, and how very uneasy we have been; but my darling, above all, take care of yourself. Do not let those wicked little things run away with you. Give George the reins if you feel them too strong for your wrist. And make him understand, Alice, how nice, how really nice, and kind, and agreeable he is. George, you must never take your eye off the ponies, and see that Miss Markham takes care."

"I hope they know my hand better than George's," said Alice, scornfully, "better than any one else's. Nobody can interfere between them and me."

"Pretty creatures! I don't know which is the prettiest," said Colonel Lenny, coming up. He had all the children in a cluster round him. "They are three beauties; that is all there is to be said. If you were not so little I could tell you now about a great number of pretty girls in a family, that were called the pride of Barbadoes. I married one of them, and my friend Markham—why, my friend Markham knew them very well, my dear madam," the Colonel said. It did not seem to be the conclusion which he intended to give to his description. However, he added, with a smile,

"But as you're so little I won't tell you about young ladies. I'll tell you about the Oboe men, and the harm they do among the poor niggers."

"Oh," cried Bell and Marie, in one breath, "we should like to hear about the young ladies best."

"Bosh!" cried the boys; "what is the good of stories about a pack of girls? I hate stories that are full of love and all that stupid stuff."

"Then here goes for the Oboe men," said the old soldier. He seated himself under the great portico, in a large Indian bamboo chair that stood there in summer, and the children perched about him like a flight of birds.

Lady Markham looked at this group for a moment, with a softening of all the anxious lines that had got into her face. She was not afraid of her husband, who had always been so good to her, but she was afraid of disapproval, and the Spears' affair was fresh in her mind. But then, in all the circumstances, that was so different!

She left the pretty group round the door, and went slowly down the avenue, that she might be the first to meet her husband. Now that the critical moment arrived, she began for the first time to think what the business could be which Colonel Lenny was waiting to discuss. "More his business than mine." What was it? This question rose in her mind, giving a little, a very little additional anxiety to her former disquietude. And then, being anxious anyhow, what wonder that her mind should glide on to the subject of Paul and what he was doing. That was a subject that was never long out of her thoughts. Would he come home when the shooting began? He could not stay up to read for ever. Would his father and he meet as father and son ought to meet? Would it be possible to reason or laugh the boy out of his foolish notions, and bring him back to right views, to the disposition which ought to belong to his father's son? This was a wide sea of troubles to be

launched upon, all starting from the tiny rivulet of alarm lest Sir William should dislike the new visitor. She went slowly down the avenue, under the flickers of sunshine and shade, under the murmuring of the leaves, catching now and then the sound of the colonel's voice in the distance, and the exclamations of the children. Ah, at their age how simple it all was—no complication of opposed wills, no unknown friends or influences to contend with! She sighed, poor lady, with happiness, and with pain. It is easy even for a mother to dismiss from her thoughts those who are happy; but how can she forget the one who perhaps is not happy, who is absent, who is among unknown elements, not good or innocent? Thus Lady Markham's thoughts, however occupied with other subjects, came back like the doves to their windows, always to Paul.

CHAPTER VI.

"HAS anything happened, papa? You are so late—nearly an hour. To-to has been almost mad with waiting—has there been an accident? We were all beginning to get frightened here."

"No accident that I know of," said Sir William. He cast a look of pleasure at the pretty equipage and the pretty charioteer—a look of proud proprietorship and paternal pride. Alice was his favourite, they all said. But notwithstanding, he would not join her till he had seen that all his portmanteaus had been got out and carefully packed on the dog-cart which had come for them. Sir William's own gentleman, Mr. Roberts, a most careful and responsible person, whose special charge these portmanteaus were, superintended the operation; but this did not satisfy his master. He stood by the pony-carriage, talking to his daughter, but

he kept his eyes upon his luggage. There were despatch-boxes, no doubt freighted with the interests of the kingdom, and too important to be left to the care of a valet, however conscientious, and a railway porter. It was only when they were all collected and safe that he took his place by the side of Alice.

"You may be sure, my dear," he said, "that unless you take similar precautions you will always be losing something." The ponies had gone off with such a start of delight the moment they were set free, that Sir William's remark was jerked out of his mouth.

"It would be quite a novelty if that happened to you—it would be rather nice, showing that you were human, like the rest of us. Did you really never, never, lose anything, papa?"

"Never," he said; and you had only to look at him to see that this was no exaggeration. Such a perfectly precise and orderly person was never seen; from the top of his hat to the tip of his well-brushed boots there was nothing out of order about him, notwithstanding his journey. His clothes fitted him perfectly; they were just of the cut and the colour that suited his age, his importance and position. That he would ever have neglected any duty, or forgotten any necessary precaution, seemed impossible. "However," he added, "I must not say too much; when I was young I have no doubt accidents happened. What I object to is that the present generation seems to think it a privilege to be forgetful. I was taught to be ashamed of it in my day."

"Oh yes, papa, we are very silly," said Alice; "though mamma says I am a little old maid and never forget. I take after you, that is what they all say."

Sir William looked at her with a benevolent smile. There is no more subtle flattery that a child can address to a parent than this of "taking after" him, though why it should please us so it would be hard to say. He

leaned back in his seat with a sense of well-deserved repose, while the impatient ponies flew along, tossing their pretty heads, their bells jingling, their hasty little hoofs beating time over the dry summer road. "This is very pleasant," he said. It was a perfect summer evening, cool after a hot day, and the road lay through a tranquil, wealthy country, so fresh after the burnt-up parks, yet full of harvest wealth; the sheaves standing in the fields, some golden breadths of corn still uncut, and the heavy richness of the full foliage throwing deep shadows eastward. The ponies flew like the wind, and Alice, holding them with firm little vigorous hands, turned her soft face to him, all lit up with pleasure at his return. A conscientious statesman, a man who has been broiling in the service of his country, sitting on committees, listening to endless wearisome discussions and all the bothers of the end of the session, it may be supposed what a pleasant relief it was to step into this little fairy carriage and be carried swiftly and softly through the happy autumn fields to his home. "All well?" he said. But a man who has a daily bulletin from his wife asks such a question tranquilly, without any anxiety for the reply.

"I wonder who that lady was in the pink bonnet," said Alice. "Strangers so seldom come out at our station. I wonder who she is going to. Perhaps it is somebody for the vicarage. Oh, yes, they are all quite well. The boys came home on Friday week, and they have never been out of mischief ever since. They are in the woods all day; and the girls have begun their holidays too. Mademoiselle has gone. We wanted only you, papa, you—and Paul. But who could that lady with the pink bonnet be?"

This second expression of curiosity was added artificially to cover the allusion to Paul. Sir William did not take any notice of either one or the other. "So Mademoiselle has gone?" he said. "I hope you keep order, and that mamma does not let them be too

irregular. They will be far happier for a little wholesome restraint."

"I suppose so," said Alice, dubiously. "Anyhow," she added, "they have had nearly a fortnight all to themselves. We have all been idle; but we will settle down into right laws and proper habits now we have got you, papa."

"That will be quite necessary," he said; then, with a slightly impatient tone, "You spoke of Paul—what is your last news of Paul?"

To-to had a very sensitive mouth. At this moment he so resented some imperceptible pull of the reins, that he got into the air altogether, capering with all his four feet, and called for Alice's complete attention. In the midst of this little excitement she said, "Paul is still at Oxford, papa. He does not write very often. Oh, you bad To-to, what do you mean by this?"

"He has got very fond of Oxford all at once."

"He has all his friends there—at least some of his friends. Papa," cried Alice, with an impulse of alarm, "I wonder who that lady can be. She is coming after us in the village fly. I saw her bonnet just now through the window, when To-to made that bolt."

"My dear, it is quite unimportant who she is—unless you think she is one of your brother's friends. Considering who his associates are, one could never be astonished at any arrival. It may be a lady lecturer, perhaps, on Female Suffrage and Universal Equality."

"Oh, papa! because he knows one man like that! But I have something to tell you—something that makes mamma and me a little uneasy. A gentleman came on Monday—oh, not a common person at all, a *gentleman*, and very nice. We could not tell what to do, but at last, after many consultations, we made up our minds to invite him to stay."

"My dear Alice!" cried Sir William, "what do you and your mother mean? Is my house to be made into an hotel? What is the meaning of it? Am I to

understand that you have taken in another nameless person, another disreputable acquaintance of Paul's? Good heavens! is your mother mad? But I will not put up with it. My house shall not be made a refuge for adventurers, a den of——"

"For that matter," said Alice growing pale, "I suppose it is mamma's house too."

There are opinions that get into the air and spread in sentiment when most opposed to principle. Nobody could have been more horrified than Lady Markham at any claim for her of woman's rights; but when her little daughter, generously bred, found herself suddenly confronted by this undoubted claim of proprietorship, a chord was struck within her which had perhaps only learned to vibrate of recent days. She looked her father in the face with sudden defiance. She had not intended it—on the contrary, the object of her mission, the chief thing in her thoughts, had been to conciliate him in respect to this visitor, and soften his probable displeasure. But a girl's mind is a delicate machine, and there is nothing that so easily changes its balance by a sudden touch. A whole claim of rights, a whole code of natural justice, blazed up in her blue eyes. She forgot To-to in her sudden indignation, looking with all the severity of logical youth in her father's face.

Sir William was altogether taken aback. He returned her look with a kind of consternation.

"You little——" But then he stopped. A man sometimes remembers (though not always) that when he is speaking to his children of their mother it is necessary to do so with respect. Unquestionably it was expedient that a girl should have full faith in her mother. Besides (it gleamed upon Sir William) Alice was not a child. She was a reasonable little creature, able, after all, more or less, to form an opinion for herself. Perhaps he was more disposed to grant this privilege to the girl who was not likely to make any

extravagant use of it, than to the boy; or perhaps his ill success in respect to the boy had taught him a lesson. Anyhow he paused. "Of course," he said, "it is also, as you say, your mamma's house. A friend of hers, I need not tell you, would be as welcome to me as a friend of my own. Do I ever attempt to settle without her who is to be asked? but with your sense, Alice, you must be aware there is a difference. I must interfere to prevent your excellent mother, who is only too good and kind, from being imposed upon by those disreputable acquaintances of Paul."

"I beg your pardon, papa," said Alice, who had been waiting breathless for the end of his address to make her eager apologies. "But," she added, not unwilling to bring him down summarily from his elevation, "the gentleman I have been speaking of declares that he is your friend, and not Paul's."

"My friend! Then I daresay it is quite simple," said Sir William, relapsing into his previous state of perfect repose and calm. "My friends are your mother's friends too."

"Ah, but this is different. (Papa, I am certain that woman is following us.) This is quite different. It is an *old* friend, whom none of us ever heard of. If we had known even his name we should not have been afraid. But do not be frightened, he is very nice. We all like him. He says he knew you in the West Indies, and the thing that alarmed us was that none of us, not even mamma, ever knew you had been there at all."

"The West Indies!" Was it possible that Sir William started so much as to shake the pony carriage in which he sat? A cloud came suddenly over his serene countenance. He did not say, as Alice fancied he would, "I know nothing about the West Indies." On the contrary, he paused, cleared his throat, and asked in a curiously restrained, yet agitated voice, "What does he—call himself?—what is his name?"

Alice was half alarmed by the effect she had produced. She did not understand it. She wanted to soften and do away with any disagreeable impression.

"Oh, he is very nice," she said. "It is not any one you will mind, papa. And he is all right; he is in the *Army List*; we looked him up at once; we took every precaution; and there he was, just as he said, J. St. John Lenny, 50th West India Regiment, Lieutenant-Colonel. After that, of course, and when he said he had known you so well, we could not hesitate any more."

"Lenny!" Sir William said. It was with a tone of relief. He drew a long breath "as if he had expected something much worse," Alice said afterwards. He took out his handkerchief and wiped his forehead. To be sure it was a warm evening. But there was something very strange to the girl in her father's agitation. She did not understand it—he who was always so calm, who never allowed anything to put him out.

"Then were you really in the West Indies, papa?"

"I was in a great many places in my youth," he said. "I was not taken care of as my boys have been. I was the youngest, and I did pretty much as I liked—a bad thing," he added, after a pause; "a very bad thing, though you children never understand it. It led me into places and among people whose very names I seem to have forgotten now."

There was a pause. Alice was very curious, but she did not venture to say more. She did not like even to look at her father who was so unusually disturbed. What could make him so unlike himself? The idea that there might be a mystery in Sir William's life was more than impossible, it was ludicrous. She tried to fix her attention upon the ponies, who were going so beautifully. Then her ear was caught by the steady roll of wheels coming after them. Certainly it was the fly from the village; and certainly it was following on to the gates of the Chase which were now in sight.

This was not the way to the vicarage or to any other house to which a stranger who had stopped at the station of Markham Royal could be going. She had not really believed it possible that the lady in the pink bonnet could be coming to the Chase; but now it seemed almost certain. What could be the meaning of it? Her heart jumped up into sudden excitement. She flourished her whip and touched the ponies till they flew. She could not bear the heavy rolling of that fly, a long way behind, yet always following with the steadiness of fate. This distracted her thoughts at once from her father, and a thousand conjectures rushed into the girl's head. Could it be somebody from Paul? The fly came pounding heavily along, nothing stopping it. What could she do to stop it or conjure its passenger away? If it was bad news that was coming in it, what doubt that it would arrive quite safely? Paul! what could a woman in a pink bonnet have to do with Paul? Could he be ill? Could he be going to marry somebody, to do something foolish? Alice became herself so excited that she could not think of her father. And her father for his part took little notice of Alice. His mind was full of thoughts that would have been very incomprehensible, very startling to her. The stranger's name had fallen upon him in his tranquillity as a stone falls into still waters. The calm surface of his mind was all broken, filled with widening and ever-widening circles of recollection. He felt dizzy like a man in a dream. The past was so long past, that, thus suddenly recalled to him, after such an interval of years, Sir William had a moment of giddy uncertainty as to whether it had actually existed at all, whether it was not a mere fable, something he had read in a book. Forty years ago—is a man responsible for things he did forty years ago? Can he be blamed if he forgets them? Can he be expected to remember? He who was so systematic, so careful, who never lost anything, who had for years

been in a position to set every one else right: was it possible that he had once been foolish as other men? He himself did not understand it. He could not believe it. Lenny? Yes, he remembered there had been a man—the West Indies—ah, yes! things had passed there which he would not care now to talk about, which had been forgotten, which were to him as if they had never been. Had they ever been? he could scarcely tell. The ponies skimmed along the road, the bells jingled, the gates of the house were in sight, another minute and they would have reached the avenue. And then—instead of his gentle wife, and his innocent children, and universal respect, service, comfort, and worship of every kind, would it be the past in bodily presence that would have to be encountered, painful explanations, revelations, which might make a sudden rending asunder of the beauty and the happiness of life? Sir William wiped his forehead again as they turned in at the gate to the shelter of the familiar trees.

And still there was the dull rumbling of the fly behind. He did not so much as hear it, having been swept away on this torrent of thought. But Alice cast a troubled glance behind as she turned round to go in at the open gate, and made sure that it was coming after her. The girl's head was buzzing and her heart throbbing with mingled fear and excitement. "Would you mind driving up the avenue yourself, papa? I have something to say to Mrs. Lowry at the gate," she said, faltering. Her father scarcely seemed to hear her; he said, "Go on, go on," with an impatient wave of his hand. She knew nothing about his alarms, nor he about hers. Perhaps, after all, the anxious desire of Alice to intercept what her hasty imagination had concluded to be a messenger of evil had something in it of that eager youthful curiosity which burns to forestall every new event. But if so disappointment was her fate. The little carriage flashed on under the trees and

through the slanting lines of sunshine in a breathless silence, both its occupants being far too much absorbed to speak. Half way up the avenue two figures were visible advancing towards them. Lady Markham had been joined by Colonel Lenny a few minutes before. They stood aside, one on each side of the road as the pony-carriage came up. And here on every other occasion Sir William had got down and walked back with his wife to the house. It was part of the formula of his return, which was never omitted. This time, however, when Alice drew up her impatient ponies, he greeted his wife without moving from the carriage.

"We have had a very tedious, dusty journey," he said. "I will go home at once, my love, pardon me, and shake my dust off."

Lady Markham, in the midst of her anxiety, grew pale with surprise at this unusual proceeding. She pressed close to the side of the little carriage—"William," she said, "do you know who it is that is with me?"

The baronet turned round to the long brown figure on the other side. "Alice has told me," he said. "Lenny, is it possible? I did not think I could have recognised you after all these years."

"Nor I you, my fine fellow," said the Colonel. "I'd have passed you if I had met you in Bond Street, Markham; but meeting you here, and knowing it's you, makes a great deal of difference. We've both of us altered in forty years."

"Is it as long as that?" Sir William said. There was no pleasure in his face such as, these innocent ladies thought, should always attend a meeting with an old friend. But on the other hand he cast no doubt upon Colonel Lenny (as indeed how could he, seeing the Colonel's name was in the *Army List*?), but addressed him unhesitatingly, and acknowledged him, which set the worst of Lady Markham's fears at rest. "Go on," he said, in an undertone to his daughter, then waved

his hand to the pedestrians. "In ten minutes I shall be with you," he cried.

The rumbling of the fly had stopped; had it gone further contrary to all Alice's anticipations? This idea gave her a little relief, but she was in so nervous a mood that the sudden jerk with which she urged the ponies forward once more upset To-to's temper, who was his mistress's favourite. He darted on through the lines of trees like a mad thing, wild with the jar to his delicate mouth and the vicinity of his stables.

"Do you want to break your own neck and mine?" Sir William said; "that pony will not bear the whip."

"Why shouldn't he bear it as well as Ta-ta?" said Alice; "is he to be humoured because he is the naughty one? It should be the other way."

"It seldom is the other way," said Sir William, moralising with a self-reference, though Alice did not understand it. "You spoke a greater truth than you are aware of. It is not the best people who are humoured in life. It is the naughty ones who get their way. If you make the worst of everything circumstances will yield to you: but act anxiously for the best and all the burden falls on your shoulders."

"Papa! that is like Thackeray; it is cynical. I never heard you speak so before."

"Nevertheless it is true," said Sir William. His straight and placid brow was ruffled with care. "One does everything one can to be secure from evil, and evil comes."

Could he be thinking about Paul? She turned her ponies (to their great disappointment) as soon as Sir William had stepped out of the carriage. Charles indeed had to come to To-to's head and lead him round, so unwilling was that little Turk to turn away from his comfortable stable again. "I will go back and bring mamma home, she was looking tired," the girl said. She was impatient to make sure about the fly that had followed from the station, and the lady in the pink

bonnet, and to be in the midst of it, at least, if anything were going to happen. Her mother was still a long way down the avenue. But Alice had scarcely turned when she perceived that there were three figures instead of two in the group she had so lately left. Three figures—and a brilliant speck of colour making itself apparent like a flag at the head of the little procession. Alice felt her heart rush to the scene of action more quickly than the ponies, which still resisted, tossing their little wicked heads. The lady with the pink bonnet had fallen into the advancing rank. She was tall, and that oriflamme towered over Lady Markham's hat with its soft gray feathers. But their pace was quite moderate, unexcited, showing no sign of trouble. Lady Markham moved along with no appearance of agitation. Perhaps, after all, this new-comer, whoever she might be, had nothing to do with the absent brother, and was no messenger of evil tidings after all.

CHAPTER VII.

"My dear, this is Mrs. Lenny," said Lady Markham. "She has kindly taken us on her way to the north."

"How do you do, my dear young lady? The Colonel wrote me word about you all, praising you up, one more than another, and I thought I'd like to come and see. But, Lenny, you never told me how like she was to her father at her age. I think I see him before me, as handsome a boy——"

"Mrs. Lenny!" cried Alice, in consternation, yet relief. She turned to her mother a pair of questioning, wondering eyes. But Lady Markham could make no answer. She slightly shrugged, so to speak, not her shoulders, but her eyebrows. She was very polite and

very hospitable, but this second arrival was almost too much for her. "I thought you looked tired, mamma," Alice continued. "I came back to drive you home."

Lady Markham shook her head. She was almost cross—as near that unpleasant state as it was possible for her to be. "Perhaps Mrs. Lenny would like to drive, Alice? She has had a long journey. I am not at all tired. I will wait and meet your papa."

"How cool it is under these delicious trees," said the lady of the pink bonnet. "Yes, indeed, if the young lady will have me, it will be a treat to be behind those beautiful ponies. Pretty creatures! like their mistress. I have not seen anything so pretty, Lenny, since we left the regiment. Ah, that was a foolish step. But one never knows when one is well off. '*Lay mew*,' as the French say, is the enemy of '*lay bieng*.' Thank you, my dear. Now this is delightful! I wish, instead of being within sight, we were three or four miles from the house."

"Take Mrs. Lenny round by the fishpond," said Lady Markham. She sighed with relief at getting rid of this new claimant upon her attention, though she was so polite. Mrs. Lenny was tall like her husband, and like him, brown and soldierly. She made the light little carriage bend on one side as she got in. Her brown face within the pink shade of the bonnet was wreathed with smiles. She was delighted like a child with the pretty equipage, and the promised drive—much more delighted than Alice was, who, though relieved of her terrors about Paul, drove off in no very happy state of mind. Yet she could not help taking a little pleasure in her own discrimination.

"I knew you were coming here the first moment I saw you," she said. "I kept asking papa who you were. But he had not seen you—he did not know you; he never knows any one—not even, if he were to see us at a distance, mamma or me."

"Nor I," said Mrs. Lenny. "I should no more have

known him! for you may be sure I took a good stare at the station, seeing it was somebody of consequence. He is so changed—oh, not for the worse, my dear; but when you see a nice little old gentleman instead of a pretty young one, it's a shock, that can't be denied. You have to count up and think back how many years it is. Somehow one never feels old one's self. You think the world has stood still with you, though it goes so fast with all the rest."

"I don't feel at all like that," said Alice. "Sometimes I feel so old—older a great deal, I am sure, than mamma."

This statement was received by her companion with laughter, which disconcerted Alice. She drew herself up. She was not so polite as her mother.

"I don't see what there is to laugh at," she said. "Age does not go only by years—when you have a great deal to think of——"

"You darling!" cried Mrs. Lenny. "Did the old woman laugh? But I'd laugh just the same if your dear mamma herself was to talk of feeling old. There's what I call a lovely woman! Lenny never told me half what a dear she was. Old! but don't you gloom at me, my pretty pet; I was once seventeen myself, though you wouldn't think it. The birds now on the trees, I daresay they feel old between one Valentine's day and another. It is not years that does it, as you say. When we come to my time of life the days go on one after another as fast as they can pelt: they're all flyin', flyin', like the echoes in the song. But at your age they're longer—they pass more slow—and when there's much to think about did you say? Ah, but that's true! When I was your age I had a great deal to think about. We were a large family, six girls of us, and not a penny among the lot. We were just ruined with the emancipation in the West Indies, and all that our parents said to us was, 'Get married! There's the officers,' they said, 'a set of simpletons!

What's the good of them but to marry the poor girls that know how to play their cards.' Ah! I thought when I was after Lenny that to be married meant to be well off, and have everything that heart could desire. And so we all thought. We weren't bad girls, don't you think it; but that was how we were brought up. Get married! and you'll be well off directly. You never had anything like that said to you to make you old with thinking—"

"Oh, no, no," said Alice, horrified. She scarcely knew whether to be offended by the familiarity of the stranger or interested in her talk. It was an experience altogether different from anything Alice knew of life.

"No, I should think not," said the lady of the pink bonnet, nodding that article vigorously. "Just figure to yourself, my dear, what you would feel if you had to leave this beautiful place, and live down in a house in the town, and have *that* said to you. You would be shocked, wouldn't you? But it did not shock us. That was how we were brought up. We had to marry by hook or by crook; and we all did marry. Well, there's Lenny, he has made me a very good husband; but marrying him wasn't like coming into a fortune, was it now?—though we've always been the best of friends. It was lucky in one way that we never had any children; it left us free to look after ourselves. Nowadays we live a great deal among our friends. We don't interfere with each other, but we're always glad to come together again. When I'm comfortable anywhere I send him word, and when he's comfortable he sends me word. You mustn't think my coming means more than that, and you must tell your dear mamma so. We've not come to do her any harm or her pretty family. Your papa is startled to see us, but he won't mind in the end. I daresay you have often heard him talk of Barbadoes and the Gavestons? We were six handsome girls, though I say it that shouldn't. You must have heard of us by name."

Alice, whom this speech had filled with wonder, shook her head. "I never heard the name in my life," she said.

"Well, that is odd," said Mrs. Lenny. "I couldn't believe it even though Lenny said so. That's thorough," she added, with a little laugh. A flush came over her brown cheek. "Never mind, my dear, it is not your fault," she said.

Alice was more and more mystified. She could not imagine what this strange woman could mean. If she had been at first disposed to resent her familiarity, that offence had altogether evaporated. Mrs. Lenny looked and spoke as if she had something to do with the family; her eyes and her tone were full of kindness even when she evidently resented the fact that Alice had never heard of her. She spoke of herself without any kind of effort, as if it were natural that the girl should be interested; and Alice could not but wish to hear more. It was like a new story, original and out of the common. The momentary pause that ensued alarmed her lest it should be coming to an end.

"Did you all marry officers?" she asked at last.

"Did we all marry officers? We did that, every one—except the one that one that married—— Ah! I mean Gussy, that was the youngest. She married—a civilian—and died, poor girl. The rest of us all took the shilling. Ah! some of the girls are dead, and the rest are scattered—one in Australia, two out in India, me, wandering about the world as you see me, Lenny and I; most likely I'll never see one of them again. We had but one brother; all the little the family had, he got it. It was he that took Gussy's boy—did I tell you she left a boy? Poor Gussy! she died at twenty. It is like as if she never had married or been more than a child. When I think of the past it's always she that comes uppermost—the little one, you know, the pet—and she never lived to get parted from us like the rest.

Alice looked vaguely interested. It seemed to her that she was hearing the prologue of a novel. She did not draw any moral from it, or ask herself whether her own brothers and sisters might ever be dispersed like this about the world; but she wanted to hear more.

"Have the others no children?" she asked.

"Dozens, my dear," said Mrs. Lenny, "here, and there, and everywhere. I've nephews in the service in every country under the sun, and nieces, all married in the army; it runs in our blood. But Gussy's boy is the one I think of most. He's not a boy now. He's five-and-thirty if he's a day, and my brother is dead that adopted him, and the property has gone from bad to worse, and I don't know what is to be done. Lenny's head is full of him. Perhaps if I were to speak a good word to your papa——"

"Could papa help him?" cried Alice, eagerly; "then you may be sure, quite sure, that he will do it. I will speak to him myself. They all say he always listens to me."

"Will you?" said Mrs. Lenny. She grasped suddenly at the firm little hand in which Alice held the reins, and put down her head as if to kiss it, then looked up with a nervous laugh, winking her eyes rapidly to cast off some tears. "You are a dear little angel!" she cried. "But Lenny will do that, and I'll do it. I won't ask it of you, my pretty darling. It would be more than was right."

Alice was somewhat affronted at this rejection of her proposal. She was bewildered by her companion's demeanour altogether. Why should she cry? and then refuse her assistance when she could have been of real use? But that was, of course, as Mrs. Lenny pleased.

"This is the fishpond," she said, more coldly. "It is very old, and there are some carp in it that are supposed to be very old too."

The fishpond was a piece of clear and beautiful water

embosomed in the richest wood. It was the very centre of all the beauties of the Chase to the Markhams. A little brook trickled into it over a little fall which made music in the silence, itself unseen, mingling a more liquid silvery tone with all the songs of the birds and the murmur of the trees. A little path wandered along by one side, the others were sloping banks of green-sward. The trees on all sides stooped as if leaning over each other's shoulders to see themselves in that fairy mirror, where they all fluttered and trembled in reflection between the glimmer of the water and the blue circle of sky, which filled up all the middle with blueness and light. Some light and graceful birches upon the bank seemed to have pressed further forward like advanced posts to get nearest the pool; a great cluster of waterlilies filled up one corner. Even the impatient ponies stood still in this soft coolness and shadow; perhaps they had caught a glimpse of their pretty tossing heads and arched necks. Mrs. Lenny's bonnet shone in that mirror like an exotic bird, poised over it, and her exclamation of delight broke the quiet with something of the same effect.

"What a lovely place!" she said; "and it's I that would live long if I were a fish in such a sweet spot. Dear, dear, if one lived here it would be a tug to die at all. And you have been here, my darling, all your life?"

"Oh, yes," said Alice, with a little laugh at the ignorance of the question. "This is home, where else could I be? This is only the second season I have ever been to town. I went for a little while last year though I was not out. This summer I have been introduced," she said, with a little innocent ostentation. "I am out now. I go wherever mamma goes."

"Introduced?" said Mrs. Lenny, with a little awe, "to her Majesty—her very self? Tell me how she looked, and all about her. Dear lady! what I'd give to hear a word out of her mouth!"

"I did not mean that," said Alice, feeling important and splendid; "introduced means going out into society. I was presented too—of course I had to be presented. Oh, there are the children down that opening—do you see them? It is holiday time, and they are all together."

Mrs. Lenny looked round with eager interest, again swaying the little carriage to one side.

"Are you the eldest?" she said; "and you have two little brothers?—only these two?"

She looked quite anxiously in Alice's face.

"Only these two—except Paul—and we are three girls—just the same number of each."

"Who is Paul?"

"Who is Paul?" said Alice, laughing; "that is the strangest question here. Paul is the eldest of all—he is *my* brother. We all come in pairs. There is Harry and Bell, Roland and Marie—and Paul is mine. He is not very much at home now," she said, her face clouding with the recollection. "He is grown up—he is at Oxford. In the holidays he does not always come home like the little ones. No one could expect him to be like the little ones. He is a man."

To a cooler observer Alice's eager explanations would have betrayed the family anxiety, of which Paul was the object. But Mrs. Lenny had other thoughts in her mind. She clasped her hands together in her lap, and said, "Dear me, dear, dear me!" with suppressed dismay. This suddenly reawakened all the girl's fears. Had it been a mistake, a pretence after all? Was it no old connection, nothing to do with papa's business? (what could papa's business matter, it would not go to any one's heart like the other) but after all some new evil that was threatening Paul?

"Mrs. Lenny," she cried, "oh tell me first, for I can bear it; is it about Paul? Has he got into any trouble? Is it something about *him* you have really come to tell us! Oh, tell me, tell me! and keep it from mamma."

"My dear," cried Mrs. Lenny, confused, "what do I know about your brother? I never heard of him before, and oh, I wish I had not heard of him now. Do you think I would harm him if I had the power to help it? Not I—not I! if there was anything in my power!"

And with this the good woman let fall upon her gloves, which were green, a few tears. Why should she cry because of Paul if she did not know him? Fortunately for Alice the ponies at that moment gave her no small trouble. She had been thinking of other things and they took the advantage. They wanted to take her home the back way into the stables. Greedy little brutes! as if they had not everything that heart of pony could desire—plenty of corn, plenty of ease, and the prettiest stable with enamelled mangers and everything handsome about them. She stopped them as they began to twist round in the wrong direction, tossing their heads aloft. If they thought to take Alice unawares they were mistaken. Thus she was obliged to withdraw her attention altogether from Mrs. Lenny and fix it upon this rebellious pair, getting them past the dangerous byway and bringing them up with a sweep and dash to the steps of the great door.

CHAPTER VIII.

MEANWHILE Sir William Markham had been strangely employed. He came home to get himself brushed free of the dust of his journey; but when he got to the house he thought of that errand no more. He asked for his letters as if these were all that he was thinking of. And you may suppose that in a house which knew the importance of letters, and was aware of all the momentous issues of neglect in that particular, Sir

William's letters were carefully arranged on the table in the library. He asked for them, which was unnecessary, and looked so full of business and importance, that Brown found "a screw loose" in his master too. This was not his usual aspect when he came home. Then the busy statesman allowed himself a holiday. Even when he was in office (much more being in opposition), he had put off his burden of official cares, and had strolled up the avenue with his wife without caring for his letters. When Brown answered respectfully, "They are in the library, Sir William ;" within himself that functionary shook his head and said, "There is something wrong." Sir William went into the library, which was large and dim and cool, the very home of quiet leisure and comfort—and closed the door after him with a sense of relief. His letters were all laid out on the table, but he did not so much as look at them. He sat down in his usual chair, and leaned his head in his hands, and gazed into the blank air before him. Was this all he had come for? Certainly he did nothing more: gazed out straight before him and saw nothing; sat motionless doing nothing; paused altogether body and soul. He was not aware yet of the second visitor who had arrived; but he was in no doubt about the first. He did not require to ask himself what his old friend,—whose name had tingled through and through him, though he had professed that he scarcely remembered it—wanted of him. That early chapter of his life which he had put away entirely, which he had honestly forgotten as if it had not been, came back to him in a moment, no longer capable of being forgotten as he sat by his daughter's side in the little pony carriage. He had not meant any harm in putting it so entirely from him. But nothing is ever lost in this tenacious world. Bury a secret in the deepest earth, and some chance digger, thinking of other things, will bring it up without intending it. Exercise even the most innocent reticence about your own affairs, matters

in which you have a perfect right to judge for yourself, and some time or other even this will come up against you like a crime. What harm had he done by burying in his own heart a little inconsequent chapter of his life, an episode that had come to an end so soon, that had left so few results behind? What results had it left? The only one had been promptly and conclusively taken off his hands. He had never felt it; he had never been conscious of any responsibility in respect to it. But that which had seemed to him nothing but a broken thread at twenty-five, was it to reappear against him at sixty like a web of fate perplexing and entangling his feet? A cold dew came out upon his forehead when he thought of his wife. Were she to hear it, were she to know, how could he ever again look her in the face? And yet he had done her no wrong. There had been no harm, no evil intention in his mind. Half inadvertence, and half a dislike to return to a matter which was an irritation to his orderly mind, as well as a recollection of pain—an incident that had come to nothing, a false beginning in life—were the causes of his original silence about his own youth and all that was in it. A man who marries at forty, is it necessary that he should unfold everything that happened to him at twenty-five? and he had been done with it all; had closed the chapter altogether so very long ago. That it should be re-opened now was intolerable. But yet Sir William knew that he must bear it; he must subdue all signs of annoyance, he must receive his unwelcome visitor as if he were pleased to see him, and ascertain what he wanted, and steal, if possible, his weapons out of his hands.

These were the thoughts in his mind as he sat alone and pondered, arranging his ideas. He had known what it was to be much troubled by public business in his day, but he had experienced little trouble with his own. All was orderly and well regulated in his private affairs: no skeletons in the cupboards, nothing

anywhere that could not meet the eye of day. It was the very sting of the present occurrence to him. A secret! That *he* should be convicted of a hidden chapter of early indiscretion, of having taken a foolish step which might have coloured all his life! Though it was no wrong to her, his wife could scarcely fail to think it a wrong, and he could not but suffer in the estimation of everybody who heard of it. Already, was he not humiliated in his own eyes? But for this pain which enabled him to rearrange his thoughts, to see his plan of operations, he felt that he must have been overwhelmed altogether. At last, with a sigh, he got up and prepared himself to issue forth out of his sanctuary, and meet the dangers that threatened him. He was to be threatened with dangers of such a sort!—it was intolerable—yet it had to be borne. He went to meet the party which he could hear coming up the avenue. Brown looked at him with suspicious eyes when he came into the hall. Could Brown know anything? Did everybody know? Even Lady Markham, when she thought, looked at him strangely, almost with alarm. But it is unnecessary to say that this was all in William's imagination. No one had as yet associated any idea of mystery with him. His wife only thought he was weary with the work of the session, and looked pale. She was standing talking to Colonel Lerew, waiting till Alice should draw up at the door. William, with a faint gleam of returning pleasure, stood on the top of the steps and waited too; but then he was confronted by the vision of the pink bonnet by his daughter's side. A pink bonnet! who had been talking of a pink bonnet? He came down slowly, half afraid of this and everything else that was new.

"In good time, Markham," said Colonel Lerew, waving his hand; "here is another old friend come to see you. She is changed more than you are. From a girl, and a pretty one, she has grown an old woman, and that's not a thing to be permitted; but an

friend, my dear fellow, and more than an old friend. Can't you see it's Katey? Katey, my wife?"

"Katey!" Even Sir William's steady nerves gave way a little. His eyes seemed to give a startled leap of alarm in their sockets. For a moment the impulse in his mind was to turn and fly. Lenny was bad, but his wife was a hundred times worse; and she looked at him, leaning out of the pony carriage and holding out her hands as if she meant to kiss him; but that was more than flesh and blood could bear. "Katey!" he said; "I cannot believe my eyes. Is it Katey Gaveston after all these years? I know I've grown an old man, and everything has changed, but——"

"You never thought to see the like of me such an old woman? Ah, Will, but it's true. I am Katey Gaveston, as sure as you stand there. I came after him, to stop him from making mischief. He don't mean it—we know that; but he's just as simple as ever. He blurts everything out."

This speech went through and through Sir William. The light seemed to fail from his eyes for a moment; but when he looked round all was as before—Lady Markham talking to Brown, and Alice to the groom, who had come for the pony carriage.

"Hush!" he said, instinctively, with a shudder, giving her his hand to help her to step out. "Hush!" Then, making a little effort over himself, he added, "We are to have time, I hope, to talk over old stories quietly—at our leisure—no need to go back in a moment from the present to the past."

"Nearly forty years—it's a long way to go back," she said. "We've grown old folks; but it's better to take our time and talk it all over quietly, as you say. Yes, yes, quietly; that is by far the best way."

Mrs. Lenny nodded till her bonnet seemed to fill all the atmosphere with pink mists of reflection, and laughed, filling the air with reverberations of sound, just as her bonnet did with flickerings of coloured

light; but she did not throw her arms round him in sisterly salutation; this was something saved at least.

Then he led her in ceremoniously to the great drawing-room, which was carefully shaded and cool and luxurious after the blaze outside. It was sweet with great bowls of late roses, full of flowers of every kind—a stately room such as Mrs. Lenny was not accustomed to see. She stopped short with a cry of admiration.

“What a lovely place! What a beautiful—beautiful house!” Then she put her handkerchief to her eyes. “To think, poor dear, who might have been the mistress of it all!” she said.

Sir William cast an alarmed glance behind him, but his wife was too far off to hear.

“You must recollect,” he said, “that *then* I had no house at all—no place to make—any one the mistress of. I never expected then to be master here.”

Mrs. Lenny sat down and wiped her eyes.

“It is a beautiful house,” she said. “I’ve been into the park, and seen a great deal; and when I think of all that’s come and gone, when I remember that you were nothing but a poor man, Will Markham, just as poor as all the rest of us—and to see you now, like a prince, with your lovely wife, and her sweet family—oh! I know you’ll forgive me, my dear lady; if your heart is as sweet as your face, you’ll forgive me; but I can’t help thinking that what is given to one is taken from another; and of them that never had a chance of happiness—them that are dead and gone—and the place where they might have been—remembers them no more.”

Lady Markham, who could not shut her heart to any distress, came and sat down by her and took her hand.

“I know what you mean,” she said. “When I have any sorrow it always comes upon me afresh in a new place.”

How far she was from knowing what her visitor meant!

Mrs. Lenny looked up surprised. Then two big honest tears burst out of her eyes, and her whole face lighted up with a smile.

"You are a darling," she said, seizing Lady Markham's soft hand in both of hers, "with a heart as feeling! But I am not crying for anything in particular, my dear—only out of excitement, and the strangeness of everything. You must not be so sorry for me."

Here Colonel Lenny interposed, and pointed out to Lady Markham the tea-table which was awaiting her.

"Give her a big cup, my dear lady; that is what makes Katey happy," he said. "What would she be without her tea? We men take something stronger, I don't deny it; but we're not so dependent upon anything. I could live without my smoke, and I could live without my drink—times have been when I've lived without eating too; but I can't fancy my wife without a tea-pot."

"Not altogether without eating, I hope. Take some cake now," said Lady Markham, smiling, "to make amends."

"I will have the cake,—but yes, altogether without eating—for as long as it lasted—that was two days; the time is apt to feel long when you've nothing to eat. I've always thought the more of breakfast and dinner and all the little bits of ornamental eating and drinking that we make no account of, since then. Oh, I've told all about it to the boys. I'm getting to an end of my stories," said the colonel. "Roland begins to know them better than I; he says, 'That's not how you told it before.' That boy is as sharp as a needle; he's the one you should make a lawyer of, my dear lady. Now Harry's a born soldier; he's up to everything that wants doing with the hands. Put him before a lion, and he'll face it, that little fellow; and

he takes in every word you say to him. But Roland, by Jove, cross-examines you as if you were in a witness-box: 'You said so-and-so before,' or 'How could you do that when you had just done so-and-so?' He's as keen as an east wind."

"That is a very biting metaphor," said Lady Markham; but it did not occur to her that the colonel was talking against time to beguile her attention and keep the conversation which was going on at the other side of the room undisturbed. There it was Sir William who was serving Mrs. Lenny with the tea his wife had poured out.

"She knows nothing," he said, in a low tone. "I did not think it was worth while telling her. For God's sake do not let her surmise it now."

"I wouldn't if I could help it, Will; but the boy—there's the boy."

"What boy? You mean Philip's boy?"

Mrs. Lenny put out her hand and grasped his.

"Haven't you heard? Philip's dead, and the property all sold up, and nothing left for one belonging to him. He never learnt, like the rest of us, to scrape and save. It's all gone—every penny. There was not so much to begin with, when you think upon it; and there he is, without a sou."

"My God!" said Sir William under his breath. He was not a man given to oaths, but he was suddenly overwhelmed by the danger that over-shadowed him which he had not thought of before. The evil he had feared was as nothing in comparison. He grew pale to his very finger-nails. "This is why you have come to me?" he said.

"Nothing but that—do I want to bother you? but *he* must be thought of, too. Will, the boy must not lose his rights."

"He must be provided for," said the baronet, gloomily; "but he has no rights."

"Will! do you mean to bring his mother out of her

grave? No rights! We came in friendship, but we'll go in anger if there is any meaning in you to disown the boy."

"I cannot say any more now," said Sir William, hastily. "I will talk to Lenny to-night."

"I don't put my faith in Lenny for that matter. Will, you must satisfy *me*."

"I will, I will, Katey! For God's sake no more."

Alice had come up to them in her easy grace of youth. She heard, if not the words, yet the tone in which they were said; and her father got up hastily and got behind the stranger to whom he was speaking so seriously, but who smiled upon the girl from her great chair.

"Come and talk to me, my pretty," Mrs. Lenny said. "Your father and I have been reminding each other of things we had both forgotten, and they're not such pleasant things as you. Come and cheer us up, my bonnie dear."

Lady Markham was very well content to see the close conversation that was going on between her husband and this new guest. It took a great burden off her mind. This time she had made no mistake—the claim of the old friendship was real. No suspicion of any kind entered her thoughts. She leaned back in her chair with a grateful sense of relief, and felt glad that she had sent orders by Brown that Mrs. Lenny was to be put into one of the best rooms, thus promoting the colonel too. There remained only one little difficulty: Mrs. Lenny's pink bonnet was a very fine article indeed, but she could not come to dinner in it. Where was she to find a toilette for the evening, since all her luggage, Lady Markham knew, consisted of a bag which she had left with the lodge-keeper? Lady Markham herself was somewhat particular about dress. She wondered privately what it would be best to do, as she leant back in her chair and listened to the colonel talking of Roland and Harry. She must

put on, she concluded, the plainest article in her wardrobe, that Mrs. Lenny might not feel uncomfortable, and she must give Alice a hint to do the same. Thus the alarming sensations aroused by this meeting subsided, to all appearance.

"Yes, you did quite right; they are old friends, very old friends," Sir William said from his dressing-room, in answer to his wife's question. "Did I never tell you I spent two years in Barbadoes? Indeed I suppose I had almost forgotten myself. My uncle had left some property there, and not being of much consequence then I was sent out to look after it. It came to nothing, like most West Indian property. The Gavestons were a family of handsome girls. I—saw a good deal of them; most of the young Englishmen who were there frequented their house. Lenny among the rest. I scarcely recollected his name; but Katey Gaveston of course I was bound to know."

"She implied, I think, that there once had been some—flirtation between you," said Lady Markham, with a smile.

"Ah!" said Sir William—his voice sounded harsher than usual, though he was painfully civil and ready to explain—"perhaps there might have been—something. It is nearly forty years ago—it is not of much consequence to any one now."

"No—you don't think I mind," she said, this time with a soft laugh. But he did not respond. He had not finished dressing, and *he* was very particular in his attire. His wife had taken a slight liberty, she felt, in disturbing him. Did she not know that he liked perfect tranquillity in that moment of preparation for dinner? It would not have occurred to him to put on a black neck-tie, or change the usual solemn dignity of his appearance on account of any visitor. Lady Markham was glad that her own very simple dress escaped notice, at least.

The other pair meanwhile were comparing notes in

their rooms, where Mrs. Lenny's preparations for dinner were by no means so simple as Lady Markham had supposed. The bag, on being opened, had proved to contain what she called "an evening body," much trimmed with lace and ribbons. She regarded this article with great complacency as she pinned the ribbons across her bosom.

"I hope you don't feel that you've any call to be ashamed of your wife, Lenny," she said. "I hope I'm fit to sit down with my lady, or the Queen herself if she were to think of asking us. There's the good of a real, excellent black silk, it does for anything; in the morning it's one dress, in the evening it's another. My Lady Markham will think I have trunks full when she sees me. She's a sweet woman; I thought so before, but I think so more than ever now, to see the handsome room she's put us in. That proves her sense. She can see I'm not one of the common sort. She doesn't know anything about the connection, and she sha'n't know it through me, to vex her, the pretty dear. She doesn't even know he was ever in the island. After all, it's a long time ago. She shall never hear a word of it through me."

"That would be all very well," said the colonel, "if there was only you and I; but you forget there's another to think of."

"I don't forget; but there's a deal more to think of than I supposed. Why shouldn't he stay where he is? It's the life he's used to. And what would he do here? Money will never be wanting; and a little money would make him a great man where he is. Don't interrupt me with your reasons, Lenny. He's my flesh and blood, not yours; and I won't do it, I haven't the heart to do it. A lovely woman, and a pretty family as you could see. Don't you know there's the heir grown up—Paul they call him? If it had been but a small boy I shouldn't have minded. And the other, what does he know about it? It can't hurt him, what he doesn't

know. And he isn't at an age to change his habits. He's no lad—he's a man as old as you or I."

"Twenty years younger, and more."

"What's twenty years?" said Mrs. Lenny, indignantly. "He's not an old man, if you please, but neither is he young. He's a man at his best—or his worst, perhaps. We haven't seen him since he was a boy. All's fixed and settled about him. And to change his country, and his condition, and his way of living all in a moment!—who could do that? scarcely the best man that ever was. He wouldn't know how to behave; he wouldn't understand what was expected of him. He'd be miserable—and so would the others too."

"I can't argue with you, Katey," said her husband; "you're so used to having your own way. I won't attempt to argue with you; but I know what's justice—and justice must surely be the best."

"Oh, justice!" cried the colonel's wife, "where do you find it in this world? Is it justice that you're only lieutenant-colonel of a West India regiment, when you ought to have been a general in the army? Don't speak to me. I know you better than any one else does, and when I say that's what you're fit for you may be sure I'm not flattering. Does a man get flattery from his wife? We may get justice in another world, and I for one hope for it; but not here. And here's just a case where justice would do more harm than good. It would do harm to both sides, and punish everybody. It would be real injustice and cruelty, and all that's bad; and would you be the one to force it—and I to recommend it? No, no; I tell you no!"

"I can't argue with you, Katey," her husband repeated. "Have it your own way. It's not my flesh and blood, as you say, but yours. But if it turns out badly, and you repent after——"

"Bless us all," cried Mrs. Lenny, starting to her feet, "there's the dinner bell!"

"I would advise you to put your cap on straight," was all the colonel said.

When this couple entered the dining-room, Mrs. Lenny felt proudly that she had achieved one of the successes of her life. Lady Markham looking up at her as she marched in on her husband's arm, with flowers rustling on her cap and lace on her shoulders, gave one look of bewildered admiration, Mrs. Lenny thought, then glanced at Alice to communicate her wonder. ("I knew she'd think I'd brought my whole wardrobe," she said to the colonel after, "and for that matter, that is fit to be seen, so I have.") The "evening body," the lace, and the ribbons took Lady Markham altogether by surprise; and it cannot be said that her own simple toilet was appreciated by her visitor. But Mrs. Lenny was very kind after dinner, and explained the simple artifice to her hostess, by way of giving a lesson to one of the best dressed of women. •

"You look very nice in your muslin, my dear," she said, "and so does that pretty darling, that would look well in anything; but when you come to my time of life it makes a difference; and roaming about from place to place how could I have room for muslins? not to say that washing is a ruination. I have one evening body made with good black silk. It costs a little more at the time, but what does that matter? And there you are, both for morning and evening, quite set up."

"It is a very admirable plan, I am sure," Lady Markham said, with great seriousness, checking with a look the laugh that was in Alice's eyes. The children were in the drawing-room, all four of them, very ready to make friends with their beloved colonel's wife.

"I feel as if I had something to do with them. I feel as if I were their grandmother, though I never had a child of my own, she said." Thus everything went harmoniously in the drawing-room, though the ladies were

all a little curious to know what kept the gentlemen so long over their wine. Sir William's coffee grew cold; he had never been known to be so late before.

CHAPTER IX.

"THEY'RE talking over old days," Mrs. Lenny had said three or four times before the gentlemen appeared. What could be more natural? No doubt they had gone from recollection to recollection: "Do you remember" this and that, and "what happened to" so-and-so? It was very easy to imagine what they were talking about, and how they got led on from one subject to another. They were heard talking, when they at last appeared, all the way up the long drawing-room, pausing at the door.

"All died out, I believe," Colonel Lenny was saying. "The last son lost his children one after another, and died himself at the last broken-hearted, poor man! The daughters were all scattered—but Katey knows more about them than I do."

"I am really afraid to ask any more questions," Sir William said. "What more natural?"

"Yes, my dear lady," Colonel Lenny resumed, taking his old place beside Lady Markham; "we have been making the most of our time; for it is very likely we may have letters to-morrow, my wife and I, summoning us away. I don't like it, and neither will she, and perhaps we may have another day, but I scarcely think it likely. I don't know how we're to drag ourselves away. You have been kinder than any one ever was; and the children have got a hold of my old heart, bless them!"

The colonel had genuine tears in his eyes.

"Lenny will tell you what I propose," said Sir William on the other side. "It is not an easy position.

I have always thought myself quite safe—quite free of responsibility; and now to be pulled up all at once; and when I think of my own boys——”

“Your own boys?” said Mrs. Lenny, raising herself very erect in her chair. “Oh, I feel for you—I feel for you, Will! but if you put the least bit of a slur on my sister or her child——”

“Don’t make it worse,” he said, throwing up his hands. *I* throw a slur! You know I never thought of anything so impossible—it *is* impossible; but how could I think of him as mine? Adoption has its rights—but Lenny will tell you what I propose.”

A short time after there were affectionate good-nights between the ladies. Lady Markham accompanied Mrs. Lenny to her room to see that she had everything she could desire.

“I am so sorry you must go to-morrow,” she said, half out of politeness, but with a little mixture of truth, for there was something in the genial warmth of the strange couple which touched her heart.

“My dear, it’s just possible we may have another day,” said the old campaigner.

The mother and daughter had a harmless little laugh together over Mrs. Lenny’s “evening body,” but they agreed that “papa’s old friends” were real friends, and adopted them with cordiality though amusement.

“She asked me a great deal about the family and about Paul,” Alice said as they separated.

“No letter again to-day,” said Lady Markham, with a sigh.

That name subdued their smiles. To think he should be the best beloved, yet so careless of their happiness!

“He is so forgetful,” they both said.

And with this so common family sigh, not any present or pressing trouble, only a fear, an anticipation, a doubt what to-morrow might bring forth, the doors of the peaceful chambers closed, and night and quiet settled down on the silent house.

No one knew, however, that the night was not so silent as it appeared. Sir William, of course, was left in his library when all the rest of the world went to bed. It was his habit. He wrote his letters, or he "got up" those questions which were always arising, and which every statesman has to know; or perhaps he only dozed in his great chair; but anyhow, it was his habit to sit up later than all the rest of the household, putting out his lamp himself when he went to bed. This night, however, after midnight when all was still, there was a mysterious conference held in the library. Mrs. Lenny came down the great staircase in her stockings not to make a noise. "I wouldn't disturb that pretty creature, not for the world," she said. "I wouldn't let her know there was a mystery, not for anything you could give me." And she spoke in a whisper during the course of the prolonged discussion, though Lady Markham was on the upper floor on the other side of the house, and safe in bed. It was Colonel Lenny who was the most stubborn of the conspirators. He spoke of right and justice with such eloquence that his wife was proud of him, even though it was she eventually who put him down, and stopped his argument. It was almost morning—a faint blueness of the new day striking in through all the windows and betraying them, when the Lennys with their shoes in their hands stole up stairs to bed. It would have been strange indeed if some conscientious domestic had not seen this very strange proceeding in the middle of the night; but if they did so, they kept the fact to themselves. Sir William took no such precautions. He shut the heavy door of the library almost ostentatiously, awaking all the silent echoes, and went up the great staircase with his candle in his hand. The rising dawn, however, cast a strange, almost ghastly look upon his face, doing away with the candle. He had told his wife that he had brought some papers from town that had to be attended to, and which

had to be sent back to London by next morning's post.

Next morning the Lennys appeared at the breakfast-table in travelling-garb, ready to go away. Mrs. Lenny had put on her pink bonnet not to lose time.

"Have you had your letters?" Lady Markham said, astonished.

"No, my dear, we have had no letters; that was to be the sign if we were wanted," Mrs. Lenny explained. Sir William did not say a word. He did not join in the regret expressed by all the rest, or in the invitations proffered. "You must come back—promise us that you will come back," the children cried; but their father maintained a steady silence which discouraged his wife.

The whole family accompanied the travellers to the door to see them drive away.

"I hope we shall see you again," Lady Markham said; then added, oppressed by her husband's silence, "when you come this way."

"My dear lady," said the colonel, kissing her hand like a Frenchman, "I shall never forget your kindness, nor my wife either; but most likely we shall never pass this way again. There is nothing in the world I should like better; but I don't know if it is to be desired."

"God bless you!" said Mrs. Lenny, taking both Lady Markham's hands, "it's not at all to be desired. Once for old friendship's sake is very well. But if I ever come here again it will not be as an old friend, but for love of you."

"That is the best reason of all," Lady Markham said, with her beautiful smile. And she stood there waving her pretty hand to the strange couple as they drove down the avenue. Mrs. Lenny's pink bonnet made a dotted line of colour all the way as she bobbed it out of the carriage window in perpetual farewells. This made the young ones laugh, though they had been near crying. Sir William alone said nothing. He had

gone in again at once when the carriage left the door.

It was that very evening, however, that the letters arrived which cast the family into so great a commotion and obliterated all recollection of the Lennys. It had pleased Lady Markham that her husband, of himself, had begun to speak of Paul the next time they met after the departure of their guests. There was a certain tenderness in his tone, a something which was quite unusual. "Have you heard from him lately?" he asked with some anxiety, "poor boy!" This was so unusual that Lady Markham would not spoil so excellent a disposition by any complaint of Paul's irregularity in correspondence. She replied that she had heard—not very long ago; that he was still in Oxford; that she hoped he would return for Alice's birthday, which was approaching. Sir William did not say any more then, but he spoke of Paul again at luncheon, saying—"Poor fellow!" this time. "He has very good abilities if he would only make the right use of them," he said.

"Oh, William!" cried Lady Markham, "he is still so young; why should not he make very good use of them yet? We were not so very wise at his age."

"That is true. I was not at all wise at his age: poor Paul!" his father said.

The ladies were quite cheered by this exhibition of interest in Paul, who had not been, they felt, so good or submissive to his father as it was right for a young man to be. "He is letting his heart speak at last," Lady Markham said when she was alone with her daughter; "he is longing to see his boy; and oh, Alice! so am I."

"May I write to him," cried Alice, eagerly, "and tell him he is to come home?"

They talked this over all the afternoon. Paul had not listened to any of their previous entreaties, but perhaps now, if he were told how his father had

melted, if he knew how everybody was longing for him! There were two letters written that afternoon, full of tenderness, full of entreaties. "If your reading is so important I will not say a word, you shall go back, you shall be left quite free; but oh, my dearest boy! surely you can spare us a week or two," Lady Markham wrote. Their spirits rose after these letters had been despatched. It did not seem possible that Paul could turn a deaf ear to such entreaties; and by this time surely he, too, must be longing for home. The future had not seemed so bright to them since first these discords began. Now, surely, if Paul would but respond as became an affectionate son, everything would be right.

Markham Chase was situated in one of those districts where the post comes in at night—a very bad thing, as is well known for the digestion, and a great enemy to sleep and comfort. No one, however, had the philosophy to do without his or her letters on that account. The ladies naturally never took it in consideration at all, and Sir William's official correspondence did not affect his nerves. Lady Markham and her daughter came early into the drawing-room that evening, while it was still daylight, though evening was advancing rapidly. The children, who felt severely the loss of Colonel Lenny and his stories, and were low spirited and out of temper in consequence, went soon to bed. Lady Markham retired into her favourite room—the large recess which made a sort of transept to the great drawing-room. It was filled at the further end by a large Elizabethan window, the upper part of which was composed of quarries of old painted glass in soft tints of greenish white and yellow; and which caught the very last rays of daylight—the lingering glories of the west. Soft mossy velvet curtains framed in, but did not shade the window, for Lady Markham was fond of light—and shrouded the entrance dividing this from the great drawing-room beyond. The fire-place

all glimmering with tiles below and bits of mirror above, with shelves of delicate china and pet ornaments, filled the great part of one side, while the other was clothed with bookcases below and pictures above, closely set. One of Raphael's early Madonnas (or a copy—there was no certainty on the subject, Lady Markham holding to its authenticity with more fervour than any other article of faith, but disinterested critics holding the latter opinion) presided over the whole; and there were some pretty landscapes, and a great many portraits—the true household gods of its mistress. There she had seated herself in the soft waning light of the evening. Alice just outside the velvet curtains was playing softly, now an old stately minuet, now an old-fashioned, quaint gavotte, now a snatch of a languid, dreamy valse—music which did not mean much, but which breathed echoes of soft pleasures past into the quiet. The soft summer twilight fading slowly out of the great window, the cool breathing of the dews and night air from the garden, the dreamy music—all lulled the mind to rest. Lady Markham made not even a pretence at occupation. What was she thinking of? When a woman has her boys out in the world—those strange, unknown, yet so familiar creatures whom she knows by heart yet knows nothing of, who have dipped into a thousand things incomprehensible to her, filling her with vague fears and aches of anxiety—of what but of them is she likely to be thinking? She was groping vaguely after her Paul in strange places which her imagination scarcely took in. When the other boys were away they too had their share in her thoughts; but they were still in the age of innocence at school, not young men abroad in the world. Where was he now? She tried to figure to herself a scene of youthful gaiety—one of the college parties she had read of in novels. She was the more bold to think of this, as she felt that her appeal to Paul just despatched would surely detach him, for a

time at least, from all such noisy scenes. Lady Markham's imagination was not her strong point. She was floating vaguely in a maze of fancies rather than forming for herself any definite picture, when Brown came into the room with the letters. The music stopped instantly, and Alice, rushing at them, uttered a tremulous cry which made the mother at once aware what had happened. Only Paul could have called forth that cry of trembling satisfaction, delight, and alarm. Lady Markham got up at once and held out her hands for the letters, while Alice ran to light the candles. "I can see, I can see," Lady Markham said. The mere fact that the letter was Paul's made it more or less luminous in itself and helped the fading light.

Sir William, seated in his library by himself, had been thinking, with a difference, much the same thoughts. With a compunction and compassion indescribable, he had been thinking of his son. Paul, with all his foolish democratical notions, was yet the most aristocratic, the most imperious of young men, knowing nothing of the evils he was so ready to take upon him, generous in giving, but to whom it would be bitterness itself to receive. Would Paul ever turn upon him, upbraid him, curse him? A shiver came over his father at the thought—and along with this a horrible sense of the position in which this haughty young heir would find himself, if—— How was it that such a possibility had altogether escaped his mind? He could not tell: he did not know how to answer himself. Forty years is a large slice out of a man's life. Even had it been some one fully known and loved, it would be unlikely that you should think of him with any persistency of reference after a separation of forty years—and a child, an infant, a thing with no personality at all! But still, he asked himself, had he never thought when Paul was born of the former time, far away in the morning haze of youth, when a young mother and a child had called forth his

interest? Yes, he had thought of it; he had thought with alarm of what had happened then; he had been more anxious about his young wife than young husbands usually are—but no more. It had never occurred to him that his child had anything to do with the other. Strange blindness in a man so accurate! He said to himself, “It will come to nothing; it will be arranged; all will be well:” but in the same breath he said, “Poor Paul! God help him! What would happen to Paul, if——”

He had not been able to do anything all day for thinking of this: he had kept his blue-book before him, but he had made nothing of it. Sir William, whose understood creed it was that public affairs went before everything, could pay no attention to these public affairs. When the letters came in, in the evening, he received them languidly, not feeling that there was anything there which could interest him so much as his own thoughts. When he saw Paul’s handwriting an unusual stir arose in his elderly bosom. But he put it down, and took up a letter from his chief, which would be no doubt of far more importance to the country, with a last attempt to conquer himself. But the words of his chief’s letter had no sense to him; he could not understand what there was to be so anxious about. Smith’s candidature for Bannockshire—what did it matter? He made a rapid and novel reflection to himself about the trifling character of the incidents which people made so much of; then laid down the solemn sheet with its coronet, and took up the letter of his boy.

A few minutes after he walked into his wife’s sitting-room, the letter open in his hand. Lady Markham was seated close to the great window against the dying light, with a candle flaring melancholy on a table beside her, reading her letter. Alice, behind her, read it too, over her mother’s shoulder: surprise and trouble were on their faces. Alice had begun to cry. Lady

Markham in her wonder and distress, was repeating a few words here and there aloud. "I can no longer hope for anything in this country of prejudice." "Going away to a new world." They were both so absorbed that they did not hear Sir William's entrance till he suddenly appeared, holding out his letter. "What is the meaning," he asked, "of this, Isabel? What is the meaning of it?" The indignation of the head of the house, which seemed to be directed against themselves, brought the two ladies with a sudden shock out of their own private dismay, and gave them a new part to play. Their hearts still quivering with the sudden blow which Paul's disclosure had given them, they still turned in a moment into apologists and defenders of Paul.

"What is it?—from Paul, William? he has written to you *too*," said Lady Markham, with trembling lips.

"What does it mean?" cried Sir William. "He is going off, he says—away—to Australia or New Zealand, or somewhere. What does it mean? No doubt he takes you into his confidence. If you have known of this intention long you ought to have let me know."

"I am as much overwhelmed as you can be, William. I have just got a letter." Lady Markham stopped, her lips trembling. "Oh, Paul, my boy! He cannot mean it," she said. "It must be some fancy of the moment. At his age everything is exaggerated. William, William, something must be done. We must go to him and save him."

"Save him! from what are we to save him?" Sir William began to pace up and down with impatience and perplexity. He was not so angry (they thought) as they had feared. He was anxious, unhappy, as they were, though querulous too. "What is the meaning of it? Follies like this do not spring up all at once. You must have seen it coming on. You must know

what it means. What has he been writing to you about lately? Is there—any woman——?”

“William!” cried his wife.

“Well!—Alice, run away; we can discuss this better without you.—Well! it need not be anything criminal or vicious, though of course that is what at once you imagine it to be. Has he spoken of any one? Has he ever—No, he would not do that. He is a fool,” cried the anxious father; “he is capable of any nonsense. But it need not necessarily be anything that is vicious—from your point of view.”

Alice had not gone away. She shrank behind her mother into the dim corner, yet to her own consciousness stood confronting her brother’s accuser with a resolute countenance, from which the colour had all gone out. Her blue eyes were open wide with horror yet denial. Whatever Paul might have done she was ready to defend him; although the possibility of any such wrongdoing went through her like a sword of fire. The light of the candle flickered upon her faintly, showing scarcely anything but her attitude, partially relieved against the lightness of the window—a slim, straight, indignant figure drawn up and set in defence.

“He has not written often lately,” said Lady Markham, faltering; “but oh, William, it is not possible; he is not capable——”

“What do you know about it?” cried Sir William, almost roughly. “How can you tell what he is capable of? A young man will go from a house like this, from his mother’s side, and will find pleasure—actual pleasure—in the society of creatures bred upon the streets; in their noisy talk, in their bad manners, in all that is most unlike you. God knows how it is; but so it is. Paul may be no better than the rest. Alice, I tell you, run away.”

Lady Markham grew red and then deadly pale. She rose trembling to her feet. “Can we go to-night? Can

we go at once?" she cried. "Oh, William, let us not lose an hour!"

"You know as well as I do there is no train after eight o'clock. Compose yourself," said Sir William. "Nothing more than what has already happened can happen to him to-night."

"We might get the express at Bluntwood—the train papa generally goes by—if we were to start at once," cried Alice, with her hand on the bell, her eyes turning from her father to her mother. The eager women on each side of him made the greatest contrast to the head of the house. Had Paul been dying instead of simply in a problematical danger, Sir William Markham would not have consented to leave his home in this headlong way, or take any step upon which he had not reflected. He waved his hand impatiently.

"You had much better go to bed," he said, "and don't worry yourself about a matter in which for the present none of us can do anything. I will go to-morrow. Sit down, Alice! Do you think Paul would thank you if you arrived breathless in the middle of the night? Try to look at the matter coolly. Excitement never does any good. I will go and see if he will listen to reason—to-morrow.

To-morrow! It seemed to both mother and sister as if a thousand calamities, too terrible to think of, might be happening, might have happened, before to-morrow; and on the other hand, how, they asked each other with a pitiful interchange of looks, were they themselves to live through the night? No feeling of this description moved Sir William. He was very much disturbed and annoyed, but certainly it would do no good to any one were he to render himself unfit for action by foolish anxiety. Nor did he feel any of that vague horror of apprehension which filled their minds. He was a great deal more angry and much less alarmed about his son's well-being. On the other hand, he was less sanguine; for he did not hope that Paul would

listen to reason, as they hoped that by their entreaties, by their tears, by the sight of the misery his resolution would bring them, Paul might relent and give way. After a while Sir William returned to his library and to his blue-books, and the official letter which he had only half-read, which he had suffered himself to be so much influenced by parental feeling as to leave in the middle ; and though he paused now and then to frown and sigh, and give a thought aside to the troubles of paternity, yet he went on with his work, and gave all the attention that was necessary to the public business, until his usual hour for going to bed.

Lady Markham and Alice spent their evening in a very different way ; they read their letter over twenty times at least ; they found new meanings in every sentence of it. Hidden things seemed to be brought out, emotions, penitences, relentings, by every new perusal. Sometimes these discoveries plunged them into deeper trouble—sometimes raised them to sudden hope. How little Paul was conscious of the subtle shades of meaning they attributed to him ! They were like commentators in all ages ; they found a thousand ideas he had never dreamed of lurking in every line of their author ; and with all these different readings in their heads spent a sleepless night.

CHAPTER X.

PAUL MARKHAM was not in his rooms. The porter at the college gate looked curiously upon the party of people who asked after him. It was not the time of year when college authorities interfere with undergraduates ; neither was a virtuous young man "staying up to read" likely to call forth their censures. The porter could not give them any information as to where to find Paul ; the party (he thought) looked anxious, just as he had seen

people look whose son had got into trouble : the father with wrinkles in his forehead, but an air of business and anxious determination to look as if there was nothing particular in it—nothing but an ordinary visit ; the mother with a redness about her eyes, but a smile, very courteous, even conciliatory, to the porter himself, and so sorry to give him trouble ; and an eager young sister clinging to the mother, looking anxiously about, staring at every figure she saw approaching.

"Here's a gentleman, sir, as can tell you, if any one can," the porter said. All three turned round simultaneously to look at the person thus indicated. He was a young man of not very distinguished appearance, who came carelessly across the quadrangle in a rough coloured suit, with a pipe in his mouth. He came along swinging his cane, smoking his pipe, not thinking of what awaited him. However, those three pairs of eyes affected him unawares. He looked up and saw the little group, and instinctively withdrew his pipe from his mouth. He had just slipped it quickly into the pocket of his loose jacket, and was trying to steal through the party under cover of a messenger who was passing, when Sir William stepped forward and addressed him—

"This man tells me," he said, "that you are a friend of my son, Paul Markham, and can perhaps give us some information where to find him."

While the father spoke, the two ladies looked at the young man with eyes half-investigating, half-imploring. He felt that they were making notes of his rough clothes, his pipe, which alas ! they had seen going into his pocket, and of a general aspect which was not very decorous, and forming opinions unfavourable, not only to himself, but to Paul ; while, at the same time, they were entreating him with soft looks to tell them where Paul was, and somehow—they could not tell how—to reassure them on his account.

Young Fairfax, who was not perhaps a very elevated

member of society in general, was of a sympathetic nature at least. He was greatly embarrassed by their looks, and confused between the two sides, giving the attention of his eyes to the ladies on the one hand, and that of his ears to Sir William on the other. He felt himself blush at the thought of his own unsatisfactory appearance—his worst clothes (for who expected to meet ladies in *August*?) and the pipe, which both literally and metaphorically burnt his pocket. Lady Markham and Alice took the redness which overspread the stranger's face, not as referring to the state of his own appearance (though they were keenly sensible of that), but as a sign that he had nothing that was comforting or satisfactory to say of Paul—and their hearts sank.

Young Fairfax coughed and cleared his throat.

"Markham?" he said. "I will go and see if he is in his rooms."

"He is not in his rooms," they said all together, a fact which the other knew very well.

When Fairfax found this little expedient of his to gain time did not answer, he ventured on a bolder step. "If you will go to Markham's rooms," he said, "I think I can find him for you. I know where he will be; that is to say I know two or three men's rooms—where he is very likely to be."

"Could not we go with this gentleman?" said Lady Markham, looking at him, though it was to her husband she spoke—and Alice looked at him too with a supplicating look which went to the young good-for-nothing's heart. He gave the ladies a look in return which he felt was apologetic, and yet full of a protest and appeal to their sense of justice. What can I do? I cannot make him all that you wish him to be; was what he felt his look said; and this was really the sentiment in his mind, though he would have laughed at himself for it. They understood him well enough, and their hearts sank a little too.

"Impossible!" said Sir William, "how could you go to—a man's rooms? perhaps into the midst of a—— party" he was going to have said riotous party, but forbore for the sake of the girl. "No, you had better take this—young gentleman's advice—"

"My name is Fairfax," said the youth, taking off his hat. He blushed again, having kept that engaging weakness, though it is not by any means sure that he had kept the modest grace of which it is the sign: and a smile crept about his lips. The hearts of the two women rose a little. If things had been very bad with Paul he would not, they reasoned, have had the heart to smile.

"Mr. Fairfax's advice," said Sir William; "go to Paul's room and wait there, and I will go with Mr. Fairfax to find him. That is much the best thing to do."

"I may have to run about to one place and another," said the young man alarmed; "it is a pity to give you so much trouble. Would not you, sir, wait with the ladies? I promise you to find him with as little delay—"

"I will go with you," said Sir William, in his cold way, which admitted of no appeal; "you know the way, Isabel, to Paul's rooms." And thus they parted, the young man looking at the ladies again with a kind of dismayed protest: can I help it? He was very much dismayed to have Sir William with him. Fairfax had not much doubt as to where Paul was, and he did not think it was a place which would please his father. He felt already that he had established an understanding with the others which justified his glance of dismay. Lady Markham and her daughter turned very reluctantly away. They went across the quadrangle with drooping heads. Everything lay vacant in the sunshine, no cheerful bustle about, the windows all black, no voices, no footsteps, no lounging figures under the trees. Slowly they went across the light with

their heads close together. "He knows where Paul is," said Lady Markham, with a sigh. "But he did not want papa to go," said Alice with another. They crept up the silent staircase and went into the vacant room, and sat down timidly, not venturing to look at anything. They were afraid of seeing something, even a book, which in Paul's absence would betray Paul. His mother glanced furtively, pitifully about her. She was more bound by honour here in her son's room, more determined to make no discoveries, than if her boy had been her enemy; and who can tell how the consciousness of this sank like a stone into her heart! A few years ago everything would have been so lightly reviewed, so gaily discussed—but now! The fringes of her cloak swept some papers off a side-table, and she let them lie, not venturing to touch them. Paul should not suppose that his mother had come to pry into his secrets. God forbid! He should be allowed to explain himself, to say the best he could for himself.

"Mr. Fairfax looked as if he knew everything. Did not you think so, mamma?"

"Oh, my darling, what can I say? He looked, I think, as if he were fond of Paul."

"That I am sure he did. He was not very nice looking, nor well dressed; but these young men are very careless, are they not, when they are living alone?"

"I should not think anything of that, dear," said Lady Markham, decidedly; "I think, too, though he was careless of his appearance, that he had an innocent look. He met your eye; there was nothing down-looking about him; and he blushed; that is always a good sign, and smiled at me, like a boy who has got a mother."

"And he did not look at all frightened to see us, as he would have done had there been anything very wrong. I think he was rather pleased—it was papa he was afraid of. Now it is clear that if Paul had been—

wicked, as papa said—(oh, Paul, Paul, I beg your pardon dear, I never thought it!)—it would have been you and me, mamma, don't you think, that they would have been afraid of? They could not have borne to look us in the face if *that* had been true; whereas," said Alice, in a tingle of logic, the tears starting into her eyes, "it was papa Mr. Fairfax was afraid of, not you or me."

"That is true," said Lady Markham, brightening slowly, but she did not take all the comfort from this potent argument that Alice expected. "Unless they are very intimate, he is not likely to know all that Paul is doing," she said, shaking her head. Paul's room was far from orderly. Once upon a time he had been very fond of knick-knacks, and had cultivated china and hung plates about the walls. All that was gone now. Lady Markham looked at the bareness of the room with a pang. Would he have neglected it so if everything had been going well with him? Perhaps had it been much decorated she would have asked herself whether these meretricious ornaments did not indicate a mind given up to frivolity; but at this moment it seemed a curious and significant fact that the ornaments had all disappeared from his walls.

In the meantime young Fairfax was hurrying Sir William at a pace which scarcely befitted his dignity, or his years, along the streets. Probably the young man forgot that his companion was likely to suffer from this rapid progress; and when he remembered, he was not without hope of tiring the angry (as he supposed) father. But Sir William was a statesman and trained to exertion. He puffed a little and got very hot, but he did not flinch. Fairfax it was evident knew very well where he was going. He made a cunning attempt to deceive his companion by pretending to pause and wonder at the first corner; then he smote his thigh, and declared that of course he knew

where Paul would be at this hour—not in any man's lodgings—with the man who was teaching him—what was it? He could not recollect what it was—wood-carving, or something of that sort. "It is a good way off; would it not be better to let me fetch him?" he said, making a last attempt. "Let us get a cab," said Sir William. "Oh, it is not so far as that," said his guide, with a blush. Sir William had a half-suspicion that he was being led round and round about to make him think the way longer than it really was; but that part of Oxford had changed since his time, and he was not quite sure of the way. At last, however, when no further delay was possible, he found himself at the door of a little grimy house, the ground floor of which seemed to be occupied as some kind of workshop, where a man sat working. The place smelt of varnish and the window was full of small picture-frames, gilt and ungilt, and other very simple articles, carved work-boxes and book-shelves. "Oh, Spears! has Markham been here?" the young man cried with a certain relief in his tone, evidently pleased not to see the person of whom he was in search. The workman looked up from his work. He was busy with a glue-pot, and the varnish which smelt so badly. He did not rise from his bench in honour of the gentleman, or remove his cap from his head. He said shortly, but in a voice of unusual sweetness and refinement—

"He is here still. He has gone up stairs, to wash his hands I suppose."

"Ah!" said Fairfax. It was not a syllable, it was a sigh. He had hoped to have escaped easily; but it was not to be so. He went to the foot of the stairs, which led directly out of the workshop. "Markham!" he cried, "are you there? Come down at once; you are wanted." How could he throw special significance into his voice? It sounded to himself just as careless as usual, though he had meant to make it very serious. "Markham, I say, there's some one

wants you—important! Come at once!” he added, going up a few steps.

Sir William stood stiffly down below, watching with the utmost attention, while the workman upon his bench eyed him with suspicious eyes.

Then Paul’s voice came still more lightly from above, striking strangely upon the ear of his father, who had never heard that tone in it before.

“Confound you, what’s the hurry?” Paul said. “If it’s a dun you ought to know better than to bring him here. I’ll come when I’m ready.”

“Markham! I tell you it’s of the first importance,” said the young man, going a step or two higher, but still quite audible to Sir William.

Then there came a burst of laughter from above, seconded by what sounded to Sir William’s suspicious ears like feminine voices.

“Is it the Vice-Chancellor?” said Paul; “or the Provost? Say the word, and I’ll get out over the leads or through the window—”

The next moment he appeared, rubbing his hands in a towel, and without his coat, with a face more full of laughter than, Sir William thought, he had ever seen it before; and this time he felt certain that he heard women laughing up stairs. He was standing with his back to the light, and his son did not see him for the moment.

Paul came down stairs, gradually emerging, always rubbing his hands. He called out—

“Who is it, Spears? What is this fellow making a fuss about?”

“I cannot tell who it is,” said the workman; “it is some one who has come into my house without taking the trouble to notice me. I presume therefore that it must be what is called a gentleman.”

The sound of the man’s voice was so pleasant that Sir William did not at first realise the offence in it; and at that moment he was too much absorbed in

watching the changes of his son's countenance to think of anything else.

Paul emerged from the shadow of the staircase, which was like a ladder, his face full of amusement and brightness, entirely at his ease, and familiar with all about him. His hat was on and his coat was off, but that evidently made no difference; neither did he cease to dry his hands with the towel as he came leisurely down stairs. It was clear that he expected no one whose appearance could require any more regard to the decorum of formal life.

When he first caught sight of his father a cloud came over him. Sir William's face was not visible, but Sir William's figure and voice were scarcely to be mistaken. The father looked on while the first shadow of fear came over his son's face; then saw it lighten with a desperate effort not to believe what was too apparent; then darken suddenly and completely with the sense of discovery and of the fate which had overtaken him. To see your child's bright countenance cloud over at the sight of you, to see the struggle of hope that this may not be you, and despair to find that it is you, what mortal parent can bear this unmoved? It would have half killed Lady Markham.

Sir William was of tougher stuff, and less entirely moved by the affections; but yet he felt it. He saw the same line come into his son's forehead which all the family knew so well in his own, and that expression of angry displeasure, impatience and gloom, came over his face. This made him too angry, in spite of himself. He said, harshly—

“Yes, Paul, it is I. I am the last person you expected, or evidently wished to see here.”

Paul came down the remaining steps, the very sound of his foot changing; he threw away his towel and took off his hat, and assumed an air of punctilious politeness.

“I do not deny that I am much surprised to see you, sir,” he said, darting a glance aside of annoyed reproach

at Fairfax. He had flushed a gloomy red, of shame and annoyance, feeling his very shirt-sleeves to be evidence against him—and looked round for his coat with an inclination to be angry with everybody.

"I had just gone to wash my hands after my work," he said, with a confused apology. Confronted thus suddenly with his father in all the solemnity of authority and parental displeasure, how could he help feeling himself at a disadvantage? He forgot everything but that his father had found him in circumstances which to him would seem equivocal, perhaps disgraceful; but he was not allowed to forget.

"If you require to apologise, Markham, for being found in my shop or my house, you had better not return here," said the master of the place, eyeing him over his shoulder from his bench, "any more."

"I beg your pardon, Spears. My father—does not think with me. It is by no will of mine that he has come here——"

"If you can't be civil, and introduce him civilly—and if he can't be civil, and doesn't know how to treat a man in his own house," said Spears, busy with his glue-pot, "you had better take him away."

"This is the man you brought to my house—in my absence," said Sir William, "imposing upon your mother. I suppose the well-known"—(he was going to say demagogue, but paused, after looking at the person in question)—"orator and leader of Trades Unions——"

"Yes, that is I," said the master of the shop. "I am quite ready to answer any question on my own account. But I beg your pardon, whoever you may be. Markham did not impose upon his mother, nor did I. He introduced me as his friend, and I lost no time in telling the lady that I was a working man. Lady Markham has the manners of a queen. She was perfectly polite to me, as I hope I am capable of being to any one who comes in the same way into my house."

Sir William gave his son's friend another look. He

had no desire to make a personal enemy of this demagogue. A public man must think of expediency in public matters, even where his own affections are concerned.

"You will excuse me," he said, coldly. "My business is with my son. I should not have intruded myself into your house had I known it. Paul, your mother is at your rooms, waiting for you. I must ask you to come there with me at once."

Paul's countenance fell still more.

"My mother!—here!"

"Good morning," said Sir William, taking off his hat with much solemnity. "I am sorry to have invaded Mr. Spears's privacy even for a moment. I will wait for you, Paul, outside."

The workman got up and took off his cap, bowing ceremoniously in answer to Sir William's salutation. He had not moved till his name was mentioned.

"There!" he cried, with comical discomfiture, "dash the little aristocrat! He has the last word—that's the worst, or the best of them. They have their senses always about them. No flurry—no feeling. Well, Paul, aren't you going? Be off with you and explain, like a good boy, to your mamma and your papa."

"What is it all about?" said a girl's voice from the top of the stairs; and first one, then another, fair, curly, somewhat unkempt head appeared peeping down upon the group below. "And who is the little old gentleman? Father, may we come down stairs?"

"Go back to your work, on the instant," said Spears; "I want no girls here. Well, Markham, why don't you go? Is your father to wait for you all day—and I too?"

"I shall go when I am ready," said Paul, gloomily.

He took a long time to put on that coat. He was not of a temper to be cowed or frightened, and for a moment he was undecided whether to defy his father directly and deny all jurisdiction or control on his part, or to take the more difficult part of extending to

Sir William that courtesy which his teacher had instructed him was due from all men to each other—from rebellious sons to fathers as well as in every other relation of life—hearing what he had to say with politeness as he would have heard any other opponent in argument. But the fact is that an argument between father and son on their reciprocal duties is a thing more difficult to maintain with perfect temper and politeness than any argument that ever took place in the Union or perhaps in Parliament itself. And Paul was bitterly angry that his father should have invaded this place, and dismayed to hear that his mother had come, and that he should have her entreaties to meet. He had not anticipated anything of the kind, strangely enough. He had expected letters of all kinds—angry, reproachful, entreating—but it had not occurred to him that his father would come in person, much less any other of the family. He was dismayed and he was angry; his heart failed him in spite of all his courage. Pride and temper forbade him to run away, yet he would have escaped if he could. He took a long time to put on his coat; he said nothing to either of the two men that stood by, and pushed Fairfax aside when he tried to help him. Spears had given up his work altogether, and stood watching his pupil with a smile upon his face.

“When does that fellow mean to go?” he said. “What is he waiting for? I like the looks of the little old gentleman, as the girls call him. There’s stuff in that man. But for him and such as him the people would have had their rights long ago; but I respect the man for all that. Markham, what do you mean by keeping him kicking his heels outside my shop in the sun? That is not the respect due from one man to another. He’s an older man than you are, and merits more consideration. What are you frightened for, man alive? Can’t you go?”

“Frightened!” cried Paul, with an indignant curl of his lip.

"Yes, frightened, nothing else; or you wouldn't take so long a time about going. Ah, that's driven him out at last! Do you know those people, Fairfax, or how did you come to bring the father here?"

"I know them? I am not half grand enough. How should I know a man who is a Right Honourable? I met them by chance. Spears, you may say what you like, but even a little rank, however it may go against reason, has an effect—"

"Do you think I need you to tell me that? If it hadn't an effect what would be the use of all we're doing? 'Why stand I in peril every day?' as that fine democrat Paul says somewhere. To be sure there's something in it. I once lived three days in that man's house. I didn't know he was absent, as he says he was. I should have liked to have stood up to him and stated my way of thinking, and seen what he had to say for himself. It was the first sneaking thing I ever knew in Markham to take me there while his father was away. Life goes on wheels in those houses," said Spears, taking his seat again upon his bench. "It was all one could do after a day or two to keep one's moral consciousness awake. A footman waited upon me hand and foot, and I never spoke to him—not as I ought to have done—about the unnatural folly of his position, till the last day. I couldn't do it; a fortnight in that place would have demoralised even me. The mother—ah, there it is! We can't build up women like that. I don't know how you're to do it without their conditions. We have good women, and brave women, and pure women, but nothing like that. You have to see it," said Spears, shaking his head, "even to know what it is."

"So long as it's only a fine lady—" said the young man.

"Don't talk of what you don't understand," said the other. "I'd have the best of everything in my Republic. I'd have that little old man's pluck and self-

command; and the lady—I don't see my way to anything like the lady."

"I have always told you, Spears, that the old society which you condemn has everything that is good in it, if you would have patience and—"

"*You* have always told me!" said Spears in his melodious voice.

He returned to his work without further argument, as if this were enough reply. He was finishing a number of little carved frames, of which his window was full. There was a bill in the window on which "Selling off" was printed in large letters. The shop was full of wood and bits of carving all done up in bundles, and everything about showed marks of an approaching departure or breaking-up. The master of the house put on his cap again and gave himself up to his work. It was not of a kind which impressed the spectator. But the man who worked was not commonplace in appearance. He was not much taller than Sir William, but had a large massive head, covered with a crop of dusky hair. The softness of his eyes corresponded with that of his voice, but the lines of the face were not soft. He took no further notice of Fairfax, who, for his part, took his neglect quite calmly. The young man took his pipe out of his pocket, where he had put it stealthily when he first caught sight of the ladies, for one moment paused, and looked at it with a look of half-comic half-serious uncertainty. Should he keep it as a memento of that interview? He looked at it again and laughed, then pulled out of another pocket a little box of matches and lighted his pipe. He, like Paul, was quite familiar and at his ease in the workman's shop.

CHAPTER XI.

"You have kept me a long time waiting," said Sir William. "I should have thought elaborate leave-takings unnecessary in a place where you seem so much at home."

"I took no leave," said Paul; "it was quite unnecessary. I shall see Spears again to-night."

Sir William turned round upon his son with quick impatience; then paused. This was not a case to be treated hastily, and patience was the best. "You and I differ in a great many points," he said; "therefore it is not wonderful perhaps that I should think you have made a curious choice of a trade to learn: for I suppose you are by way of learning a trade. Don't you think a certain amount of civilisation is necessary before picture-frames will become remunerative? I don't think you could live by them in the bush."

Paul coloured high with that acute sense of being open to ridicule which is so terrible to youth. "Spears is selling off his stock," he said. "I do not know if it is a sign of high civilisation, but he sells his picture-frames and lives by them. Most men of genius have been reduced to make their livelihood by some inferior branch of their work."

"And what then do you call his highest work?" Sir William asked carelessly. Paul, astonished, but willing to believe that his father had taken an interest in Spears and that all was about to go as he wished, fell into the trap, as any other unsuspecting nature would have done.

"His carvings are wonderful," he said, with all the fervour of enthusiasm. "When he has a congenial subject he is equal to Gibbons or any one. He ought to have been a great sculptor. If you saw some of the

things he has done you would see what bitter satire it is that *he* should live by those wretched little picture-frames."

"Is it so, indeed?" said Sir William. "Then it is the higher branch of wood-carving and not picture-frames that you are learning, I suppose? Do you mean then to carry high art, Paul, into the bush?"

"I cannot see what this has to do with the bush, sir," said Paul, impatiently. "One must live there by one's hands, and to know how to use them in any special way cannot be a disadvantage in any other way. That is Spears's view of the subject, and mine too."

"I doubt if wood-carving will help you much in felling trees or making them into huts," said Sir William, with a great air of candour. "What do you suppose the advantage is likely to be of changing from a state of society where everything that is beautiful has its value, to one where you will live by your hands, as you say, and where the highest skill will only not do you any harm? I should like to know the reasoning by which you have arrived at your present convictions—the ideas expressed in the letter I got last night."

"You have received my letter then?" Paul said, with dignity. "You know what my settled determination is. I hope you do not mean, and that my mother does not mean, to attempt to turn me from a plan which I have not decided on without great thought."

"I don't know what your mother may mean to do, my boy," said Sir William, quietly. "She will act according to her own standards of duty, not mine; but I know what I intend myself, and the first thing is to understand your reasons for the extraordinary step you propose. You, the heir of a fine property——" Sir William made a stumble before the word *heir*, which, notwithstanding that Paul was about to abjure everything, led him to make a rapid calculation of his father's power in this matter. The Markham property was not all entailed. Did the father mean to dis

inherit his lawful successor? Paul felt a flush of indignation go over him, though he was about to declare his intention of giving up all.

"The heir of a fine property," said Sir William, "and an influential position. At this moment, young as you are, you might make a start in public life, and have a hand in the government of your country, which is as high an ambition as a man can entertain. How have you managed to persuade yourself that to go out into a half savage country and encounter the first difficulties of savage life is better or more honourable than this? To live by your hands instead of your head," he continued, growing warm, "to surround yourself with beggarly elements of living instead of the highest developments of civilisation—to make yourself of no more account than any ploughboy——"

Here Paul felt himself touch the ground. There had stolen over him a chill of alarm as to how he was to answer such a question, but this last clause brought him back to the superficial polemics with which he was familiar enough. "Why should I be of more account than any ploughboy?" he said; "that is the whole question. Why is there this immense gulf between the ploughboy and me? Is he less a man than I am? Are not my advantages a shame to me in the face of manhood? What right have I to humiliate him for my advancement?"

"What right have you to be a fool?" said Sir William, bitterly. "I don't know: your mother is not a fool, though she is not clever. If your ploughboy had been educated as you have been, your argument might have had some show of reason. Do you mean to tell me that education is nothing—that a lad from the fields ought to be of as much use in the world as you are? This is to despise not only rank, which I know is your favourite type of injustice, but breeding, culture, everything you have acquired by your work. How do you justify yourself in throwing

away *that*? There is no question of humiliating the ploughboy; the ploughboy will be of ten times as much use as you are in the bush."

This view of the question was not pleasant to Paul. He held himself up with great stateliness, and did not deign to look at his father. "That remains to be seen, sir," he said.

"What remains to be seen?—that a man brought up to farming will make a better farmer than you—or your friend the wood-carver? Suppose we consider the question from his point of view," said Sir William. "He is a skilled workman, you tell me."

"I said a man of genius."

"All the better for my argument. Your man of genius," Sir William went on with a barely perceptible smile, "may be—appreciated, let us say, in a country like this, where art is known: but who will care for his art where he is going?"

"More than here," cried Paul hotly, interrupting his father. "Here, because he has no money, nor position to make him known, and no impudence to push him into favour, his beautiful work is taken no notice of, and he lives by making picture-frames. Ploughing and digging is better than that. The earth at least is grateful for what is done for her."

"Not always," said Sir William. "I thought you had heard enough about farming to know better. However, the advantage of emigrating to your—friend, will be, not the gain of anything, but the giving up of his work, and the sacrifice of what you call his genius. No, I do not scoff at his genius. I know nothing about it. I take it on your word. Your man of genius will throw away his chief distinction on your own showing; and *you* will throw away what as yet are your only distinctions, the position you derive from your ancestors, the education which you have got (partially) by your own exertions—for what? to attempt to do clumsily what two

ploughmen could do much better than you.—Ah ! who is that ? ”

Paul's eye had been caught some moments before by a lady coming towards them, at sight of whom a sudden flush came over his face. A lady ! was she a lady ? She was dressed very simply in a black alpaca gown, the long plain lines of which harmonised and gave elegance to a tall, well-developed figure. The dress was well made and graceful, such as any lady might have worn ; but the little hat upon the young woman's head was doubtful. Even Sir William, who looked somewhat anxiously at her, seeing the flush on his son's face, felt that it was doubtful. The faded brown velvet and scrubby little feather did not suit the rest of the dress. She walked well, as she came towards them, but when she perceived Paul and his companion, an air of embarrassment which was half fright, came over her face. When Paul, all red and glowing with a mixture of feelings which Sir William could not fathom, took off his hat, she gave him an alarmed, inquiring look, blushed fiercely, and replied to his salutation with a hurried nod of her head, which made the question of her position more uncertain than ever. Still she was a handsome young woman : before she had seen Paul, Sir William himself had remarked her stately carriage and figure. “ Who is that ? ” he repeated, suspicious, as a parent naturally is of a young man's unknown female friends, yet not unprepared to hear that it was somebody not unworthy to be known by Sir William Markham's son ; for it might well be that ladies in a learned community, fearless of misconception, were not always so particular as could be desired about their hats. He turned half round and gave a glance after her as she continued her way, which, as she had just done the same, was somewhat awkward. But Paul marched straight forward and took no notice. “ Who is that ? ” Sir William repeated, sharply, determined this time to have a reply.

Paul's blush and discomfiture, and his marked and ceremonious recognition of the stranger, meant several things. They meant that he felt himself certain to be misconstrued, yet was too proud and too sincere to take any means of avoiding misconstruction; that he was annoyed by the encounter, alarmed by the new idea which his father would certainly take up in consequence; yet forced by this alarm and annoyance to show a more marked and excessive courtesy to the person (oh, had she but gone down another street and kept out of the way!) whose appearance plunged him into so much confusion, and would, he felt sure, complicate everything. Whether this sudden liveliness of consciousness did not mean that there was cause for alarm is another matter. In the meantime all that Paul felt was that the girl's name once mentioned must add tenfold to the difficulty of his position.

"Who is it? It is Spear's eldest daughter," he said curtly, with a new and brilliant suffusion of colour over all his face.

"Oh!" was all Sir William said. What more was necessary? The young man felt, with a sensation of intolerable impatience that he was judged and condemned on the spot; but he could not protest against a conclusion which was not put into words. If he said anything, would not his guilt be considered doubly proved? Silence seemed his only policy; and no more was said. The discussion, which had been so serious, came to a dead stop. They walked on together without saying another word. Sir William, who had been so bent upon convincing his son, dropped his argument all at once. Paul did not look at him, but yet he was aware that the line on his forehead, the pucker that meant trouble, had deepened. The young man felt himself suddenly in the grip of despair. He felt himself judged, the question settled, everything changed. His whole conduct had assumed a new light in his father's eyes, and it was a false light. Instead of

respecting him as the logical if rash devotee of certain fixed principles, his father evidently concluded him to be the victim of a commonplace love affair. How was Paul to overcome this hasty and false judgment? Pride and prudence alike made it necessary that he should take no notice of it. He held his head higher in the air than ever, and walked on with a certain protestation and appeal against the injustice done him in every step he took. Sir William, on his side, dropped the argument with a mixture of despair and contempt. This was how it was—far more easy to understand than democratic ideas or communistic principles in the heir to a great property, here was an inducement which was plain to the meanest capacity: a fine, handsome, young woman! This was how it was! Sir William felt angry with himself for being duped, and for having really for a moment believed in the revolutionary sentiments which had been assumed (he had no doubt) in order to carry on this other pursuit. How foolish he had been to allow himself to be thus deceived! He gave up his argument with an abruptness which had impatience in it, and for the moment he could not say anything to the boy who had thus succeeded in deceiving him, and added the feeling of shame for his own gullibility to that of anger. He had taken the trouble to attempt to convince him, to believe in an intellectual error, which, however exasperating, was not discreditable—and this was how it was!

What was to be done? It was all a mistake, but Paul could not say so, for his father did not condescend to make any accusation. Thus they walked on, fuming both with indignation and impatience. Now and then the young man eyed his father as if he could have taken him by the shoulders and shaken him, an undutiful form of the mutual exasperation. But Sir William was beyond this. What was the good? He would save his breath, he thought, for better purposes. Why should he talk himself hoarse while Paul laughed

in his sleeve, not caring a straw for his arguments, meaning perhaps to laugh with the girl the next time they met over the ease with which his father had fallen into the snare. No, the fellow was not worthy of argument; he who was capable of masking an unworthy entanglement in this way. Let his mother try her hand upon him, the father thought, indignantly. She might do something. A woman's tears and suffering are sometimes more effectual than reason. Sir William felt in his indignant disgust that to let his own beautiful and perfect wife enter the lists against this—hussy—yes, he was coarse in his vexation and distress—to let Lady Markham, the pride of the county, a woman whom it was a glory for a man to have won—to let her come down from her pedestal and humble herself to the pleadings and the tears of an anxious mother for a boy so little worthy of her as to be capable of such a connection—was a disgrace. But then he knew that was not how she would feel it. She would not think of her own dignity. And she would get it all out of him—women can; they do not disdain to return and return to the inquiry, to ask question after question; he would not be able to elude her examination. She would get it all out of him—how far it had gone, all about it. And then some strong step must be taken—something must be done—though, for the moment, he could not think what that something should be.

"I see them at last," said Alice from the window. "Oh, Paul! Papa is coming along quite quietly, not scolding him. He is looking—not so angry. It is so natural to see them walking along—quite friendly. He is not scolding——"

"Oh, my dear! do not use such a word. Scold! we might scold Harry for climbing trees: but this is too serious, far too serious. How is my poor boy looking? Oh, I hope—I hope your papahas not been hard upon him. Men forget that they were once young and foolish too"

"That was what I meant," said Alice. "I wonder—they are not saying anything to each other, mamma."

Lady Markham had come to the window and was looking out too, over her child's shoulder, while the father and the son came along the street together, silent, separated by so much that was real, and something that was mistaken. The mother and daughter looked out together with but one heart. Not a breath had ever come between these two: they knew each other absolutely as no one else knew either. How could it be possible for them to misunderstand each other, to fall apart, to experience ever whatever might happen, the chill distance and severance which was between Sir William and his son? Lady Markham leant upon her child's shoulder.

"Not a word," she said; "not a word. Oh, my boy—my boy! Your father must have given it up; he must think there is nothing more to be said."

"But we will never give him up!" cried the girl. "How could we give him up? That is impossible. You could as soon give up *me*!"

"Not Paul, dear—never Paul: but the attempt to turn him from his own way. If he will not listen to your papa, Alice, what attention will he pay to me and you?"

Alice had no answer to make to this question, so intent was she, watching the expression of Paul's face as he crossed the street and disappeared under the gateway. She read in it, or thought she read in it, the conclusion of a stormy argument, the opposition to all that could be said to him, the determination to have his own way which was natural to Paul. And she too, with a sigh, recognised the futility of argument.

"He never would listen to papa," she said. "Papa proves you so in the wrong that you can't help going on with it. But he will not be cruel to you and me. Oh, when he knows it will break our hearts!" said Alice.

And then they were silent, hearing the steps come up the staircase, turning two pairs of anxious eyes towards the door. Sir William came in first with a kind of stern introduction of the culprit.

"Here is Paul," he said. And then without any words, with a certain half-protest against their presence there at all, Paul submitted to be kissed by his mother and sister. They stood all together in a confused group for a moment, not knowing what to do or say, for it is difficult to rush into such a subject as this which was in all their thoughts in a company of four. Lady Markham held her boy by the hand, and looked at him pathetically with an unspoken appeal which made his heart ache, but felt that she must have him to herself, must be free of all spectators, before she could say all she had to say to him. "We had better go back to the inn and get some luncheon," said Sir William, breaking the spell with practical simplicity. He took his wife by the arm as they went down stairs. "The democracy is a pretence, and so is the fancy for a new world," he half-whispered, hissing into her ear. "It is a woman, as I thought."

Lady Markham started so that she almost lost her footing, and her parasol fell out of her hand.

"A woman?" she said, with a scarlet blush of trouble and shame. The first intrusion of this possibility daunts and terrifies a mother. A woman! what does that mean?—not the pure and delicate love with which all her thoughts would be in sympathy; something very different. The shock of separation between the boy, the heir of all her hopes, and a man half-known, who is no longer the child of her bosom, was almost more than she could bear. The cry she gave echoed low but bitter through the empty passages, where many such have echoed, audible or inaudible, before.

CHAPTER XII.

"I CANNOT move him one step from his resolution," said Lady Markham, pressing her hands over her eyes. They were aching with tears, with the sleeplessness of the past night, and that burning of anxiety which is worse than either. "He does not seem to care for what I say to him. His mind is made up, he declares. God help us! William, our eldest boy! And he used to be so good, so affectionate; but now he will not listen to a word I say."

They were in a room in the hotel, one of those bare and loveless rooms, denuded of everything that is warm or homelike, in which so often the bitterest scenes of the tragedy of our life take place. Lady Markham sat by the bare table; Sir William paced up and down between that and the door. Outside was all the commotion of one of those big caravanserais which have become so common in England, echoes of noisy parties below, and a constant passage up and down of many feet. Trouble itself is made harder vulgarised by such contact. They were far too much absorbed to think of this, yet it made them a little more miserable unawares.

"Does he mean to marry her?" Sir William said.

"Oh!" cried Lady Markham, with a start as if she had received a blow; "I cannot think it is that. He will not allow it is that. It is, what he has always said, those new principles, those revolutionary ideas. I do not know what those men are worthy of who fill a boy's head with ridiculous theories, who teach him to despise his home."

"There are few who are much harmed by that. Isabel you must not be squeamish. You must forget you are a delicate lady, and speak plainly. I know

what a young man is at Paul's age ; they can hold the wildest theories without feeling any necessity to act upon them. It is a privilege of youth ; but against that other kind of influence, they are helpless. And a woman like you does not understand the arts and the wiles of these others. And he does not know how important it is," said Sir William, with a piteous tone in his voice ; "he does not know——"

"He knows very well what he is to me and to you," Lady Markham said. In this particular she spoke with perfect calm, not fearing anything. "How should he not know ? I have not hidden it from him that a great part of the happiness of my life hangs upon his. It seems ungrateful when one has so many blessings ; but, oh ! if *one* is in trouble, how can you be comforted though all the others are well ? All your heart goes to the one. It is not that you love the others less, but *him* more—*him* more."

Sir William listened to this outburst without a word. They were bearing one burden between them, and yet each had a separate burden to bear. His heart would not be racked like hers by the desertion of the boy. He would not concentrate his whole soul on Paul because Paul was in trouble. But on the other hand, she was altogether unaware of what was in his thoughts, the doubtful position in which perhaps Paul might one day find himself ; the need there was that his future should be within his own power to shape and form. Also Sir William was aware of the disappointment and misery awaiting those who compromise their whole lives in one fit of foolish passion, and secure their own misery by a hasty marriage. These were the things he was thinking of. He saw his son waking up to the realities of a life very different from anything he had dreamed—and encumbered, he, so fastidious, so fantastical, with an uneducated woman and all the miseries of premature fatherhood. He groaned as this picture arose in his mind.

"Trouble," he said. "Yes, I suppose if a young man allows himself to get entangled, there is trouble involved in the breaking of the tie; but not half so much trouble as will come after, when his life is dragged down by association with a woman like that,—when he has a wretched home, a sordid life, a hundred miserable necessities to provide for,—you don't know what it is, you can't know what it is——"

He broke off abruptly. Would she perhaps suspect him—*him*, her husband—of having learned by experience what these horrors were?

But no such notion entered Lady Markham's mind. "No," she said; "I think you are wrong, William. I think it is not *that* that is in my boy's mind. Oh, if one could know—if one could feel sure, that his heart was open as it used to be!"

Here she paused; and there was silence between the two, Sir William walking slowly up and down, with his head forward, and she sitting wistful gazing into the dark air, her eyes enlarged with anxiety and pain. They were such prosperous, happy people—so well off, so full of everything that can make life smooth and sweet, that the silence of their trouble was all the more impressive—so many things that harm poorer people would have passed innocently over them. They had such a stock (people might have said) of comfort and happiness to fall back upon. Nevertheless, this blow was so skilfully dealt, that it found out the weak places in their armour at once. To Sir William, indeed, it came as a sort of retribution! but what had his wife done to have her gladness thus stolen away from her? Fortunately those who suffer thus innocently are not those who ask such questions. She shed her tears silently, with many prayers for him who was the cause; but she did not complain of the pain which was laid upon her for no fault of hers. They had talked it all over in every possible aspect, and now they were silent, saying nothing. What was there to say? They could

do nothing, however they might toil or struggle. It was not in their power to change the circumstances. Even Sir William, though he was a man of much influence, a great personage, of importance in Europe—capable perhaps of stopping revolutions, of transforming the face of a country, and modifying the fortunes of a race by the advice he might give—was powerless before his boy. He could not turn Paul from the way he had chosen, nor persuade him to think differently. He might be able to destroy old corporations, to raise up new cities, to disestablish a church, or disturb an empire; but he could not make a change in the fancies of his son—whether it was in his opinions, or in his inclinations; that was altogether beyond his power. He sighed heavily as he went and came from the dull green-painted wall, to the dull table covered with a green cloth. The Queen might listen to him, and the country; but Paul would not listen. What wonder that his wife covering her hot eyes with her hand, and knowing that Paul's contumacy would steal all the pleasure out of her life, should feel herself powerless too?

There was one thing however that threw a little light on Lady Markham's thoughts—one person to whom she could still appeal. She did not speak of this to her husband, who might, she felt, oppose her purpose. But she told Alice, with whom her consultations were still more confidential and detailed.

"He was made welcome in our house," she said; "he was received as well as if he had been—any one else; and he is not a man without sense or feeling. If it is put before him as it ought, he will understand. I will go and speak to Mr. Spears——"

"About—his daughter?" Alice faltered.

Lady Markham did not make any reply. She would not say anything about the chief object of her mission. What she wanted above all things was to test the truthfulness of her son's assertion that this daughter

was nothing to him. Sir William put no faith in these assertions; but Paul's mother believed in him with trembling, even while she feared, and longed for some indirect testimony which would convince her husband. She thought over it all night, while she lay awake listening to the clocks answering each other with hour after hour.

Paul had not responded to his mother's inquiries, as they had all hoped. He had resisted her questions proudly, and he had not attempted to explain.

"You have made up your mind, you and my father, that I have not spoken the truth," he said. "Why should I repeat what you will not believe? I have nothing to say but what I have said."

"Oh, Paul, look in my face, and tell me—tell me!" she said. "I will not doubt you." But he was obdurate.

"I have told you," he said, "and you have doubted."

There was something even in this pride and indignant resistance of her entreaties which moved his mother to believe in him; but Sir William was of a different opinion. Her heart was torn asunder with doubt and fear; and here was the one way in which she could know. Her husband might think of Spears as a dangerous demagogue, but to her he was a man whose face had brightened at the sight of her children, a man to whom she had given her own ready sympathy—a human creature, whom she knew. Had she not a right to go to him, to appeal to him to relinquish his hold on her boy? Whether it was by his arguments, or by something less abstract, he had, it seemed, power which was almost absolute over her boy. Lady Markham did not mean to say anything to him about his daughter, to ask him whether it was love for her which was leading Paul away; but could any one doubt that she would discover the truth if she could see him, and speak to him without any one to interfere between them? She could not endure the doubts of Paul which

rose in her own mind, nor to be obliged to listen to his father's doubts of him, and say no word in his defence.

Notwithstanding her sleepless night, she got up very early in the morning, full of this idea, and stole out of the inn unperceived. It was not till the morning air blowing in her face, and the looks of the passers-by, which, like any one unaccustomed to go about alone, she thought specially directed to her, had fully roused her out of the mist of thought in which she was enveloped, that she remembered that she did not know where Spears was to be found. What was she to do? She went along vaguely, unwilling to return, past Paul's college, with all its vacant windows twinkling in the sun, by the way which her husband had taken when he went to seek Paul the day before. Her heart gave a little leap as she passed the gate to see some one come out whose face seemed familiar to her. Was it Paul so early? Had he changed his habits like everything else? But she saw very well it was not Paul; it was his friend who had guided Sir William in search of him on the previous day.

Young Fairfax took off his hat respectfully, and would have passed, but she stopped and beckoned to him to come to her. Here, too, Providence had thrown in her way a witness who might corroborate Paul. She was out of breath with agitation when he came across the street.

"Can I—be of any use, Lady Markham?" the young man said.

"If it will not detain you—if it is not out of your way," she said, with anxious politeness, "would you show me where Mr. Spears lives—Mr. Spears—I think my husband said you knew him—the—the public speaker—the—very great Radical—he whom my son knows?"

Fairfax was puzzled for the moment by this respectful description.

"Oh, Spears!" he cried at last, suddenly waking to intelligence; he had not heard him called Mr. Spears

before. A laugh woke about the corners of his mouth. He was apt to laugh at most things, and it amused him to hear the softening politeness with which the great lady spoke of the demagogue. But the next moment the wistful anxiety in Lady Markham's eyes made him ashamed of his smile.

"I will show you the place if you will let me go with you," he said.

It seemed some strange negligence on the part of the race generally that such a woman should be unattended wherever she might choose to go. He was a democrat too, mildly, with less devotion to Spears than Paul, yet with some interest in his teaching; but Paul's mother roused within him a natural loyalty and respect which was not in accordance with these principles—loyalty in which a subtle unexpressed regard for her rank mingled with reverence for herself. It was not as a mere woman and his friend's mother, but also as a lady—the kind that queens are made of—that she affected his mind. The idea of her required an attendant, a servant, a retainer. He put himself into the vacant place hastily, to repair the neglect of the world.

Lady Markham took an unfair advantage of this devotion. She plied him with questions—subtle and skilful—not always about Paul, but coming back to Paul with many a wily twist and turn. She threw herself with the warmest pretence of interest into his own career—what he was doing, how his studies were being directed, what his future was to be? Was it a pretence? No, it was not altogether a pretence. She could not but be polite, and true politeness cannot but be interested. She was pleased that he should tell her about himself, and a kind of shadow of an anxiety that he too should do well came into her mind—a shadow faint and vague of her great anxiety and longing that Paul should do well, better than any one had ever done before. And like a lark descending in circles of cautious approach to her home, she came back to Paul when her

young companion was off his guard, when she had beguiled him to babble of himself.

"Ah!" she said, "I fear you are both idle, both Paul and you," when Fairfax had been making confession of sundry shortcomings.

"No, Markham is not like me," he said. "Markham puts more of himself into everything; he does not take things lightly as I do. He is a more serious fellow altogether. That makes me rather fear Spears's influence over him, if you will let me say so."

"Indeed I will let you say so," Paul's mother replied. "That is just what makes me unhappy. He is a great deal with Mr. Spears?"

"One time and another—yes, they have seen a great deal of each other," Fairfax said. "Perhaps you don't know, Spears is the most entertaining fellow. He has his own opinion about everything. I think myself he is wrong just as often as he is right; but he has his own way of looking at things. I don't go with him in half he says, but I like to hear him talk——"

"And his house is a pleasant place to go to?" said the anxious mother. "Excuse me if I don't quite know. He is not in any kind of society, but he has a family? It is a pleasant house?"

Fairfax stared and then he laughed.

"It is not a house at all, in the way you think of," he said. "I don't suppose you can form any idea—we go and talk to him in his workshop. There is no sort of ceremony. He will hold forth for the hour when he is in the vein, and he is very entertaining—but as for what you understand by a pleasant house——"

Lady Markham's heart grew lighter every moment.

"But he has a family?" she said.

"Oh, yes—there are girls, I believe," said Fairfax. Was he on his guard? She almost feared the directness of this question had put him on his guard. "One sees them sometimes running out and in, but that has nothing to do with it," he added, carelessly.

"In his class it is not at all the same as in other ranks of life."

Here there was a pause. Not an inference was there in all this of any other influence than that of the political visionary—the influence which Paul acknowledged. Lady Markham's heart had given a leap of pleasure. Oh, if Sir William had but heard this careless, impartial witness, every word of whose evidence supported that of Paul! But then a chill breath of suspicion came over her. What if he were less unconscious than she thought, skilfully arranging his replies so as to back up Paul's assertions? This discouraged and silenced her, in spite of herself. How easy it is to learn the miserable alphabet of suspicion! She went along with him doubtfully, sick at heart, asking no more questions, not knowing whether there was anything in the whole matter to which she could trust.

"There is Spears's shop. You will find him at work already; he is always early. May I come back again for you, Lady Markham, in case you should miss the way to the hotel?"

"You are very kind," she said; but the sight of the place where Paul had spent so much of his time raised again a sick flutter in her bosom. She waved her hand to him without any further reply, with a smile which went to his heart; and then crossed over, dismissing him thus, and went direct to the fountain-head of information—to Spears's open door.

CHAPTER XIII.

SPEARS was seated on his bench, with his tools and his glue-pot, as Sir William had seen him on the previous day, when Lady Markham entered the shop.

He had never ceased to be industrious at his work, though he had so many other things to do. Indeed, the many other things he had to do made it incumbent upon him to work early and late, in order to keep, as he called it, "the pot boiling." For he was not a paid agitator. The man was proud, as men will be in all stations; and, moreover, he was uncertain—not to be calculated upon as a supporter of all kinds of measures which might be proved good for "the trade," and therefore not half so serviceable an implement as many who were much less powerful. Like the independent member who cannot be trusted always to vote with one party, he was looked upon with doubt even by those who took the greatest advantage of his gifts. His influence had never done himself any good. He had acquired it by exhausting labour, which had taken him away from the work by which he made his bread, without supplying any bread in the interval to nourish those who were dependent upon him; and the consequence was that he had to work at other times early and late, and was saved from all possibility of the idle life which a stump orator may be so easily led into. His shop itself was swept and clean, the boards freshly watered in large damp circles still marked upon the wood, and a great bundle of large flowers—sunflowers and dahlias—stuck into a large jug, stood in the window among the picture-frames. Some brilliant gladiolas, in the brightest tints of colour, lay neglected on the floor, and a great magnificent stalk of foxglove nodded on the table at which he was working. These floral decorations, unexpected in such a place, made the shop cheerful; and so did a stray ray of morning sun, which got in through a break in the houses opposite, and fell across it, dividing it as with a line of gold. The door stood open; the air, even though laden with varnish, retained some freshness. Lady Markham came in softly, and stood, her heart beating, not knowing well how to open this important interview,

in the middle of the sunshine. Her breath came quick. Now that she had arrived at the point for which she had been aiming, a sudden alarm seized her. Might it not have been better, she asked herself, hurriedly, to remain in ignorance—not to seek to be convinced? There are things which it is better not to know.

Spears, who was whistling over his work, did not hear the light footstep coming in; but he noted, with the quick sense of a man to whom daylight is indispensable, the shadow that had come across the sunshine. He paused and looked up. A doubt—a question came over his face. Was it possible he did not know her? Then he rose and came forward, holding out to Lady Markham a hand not free from stains of the varnish which perfumed the shop.

"Is it you, my lady?" he cried. His face beamed over with a smile of welcome, but showed no surprise or alarm at the appearance of such an inquisitor. He drew forth a rough wooden seat without any back, and placed it in the centre of the vacant space.

"I am very glad to see you in my poor place," he said.

"Thank you," said Lady Markham. She glanced round her with a little perturbation. She did not know how to begin. "Mr. Spears!" she said, faltering a little, "I was very glad to see you in *my* house."

"Were you, my lady?" He stood before her with a good-humoured smile upon his face, but slightly shook his head. "Never mind, you were as kind as if you had been glad to see me, and that says more. But your husband upbraided me for coming to his house in his absence, which you know was your son's fault, and not mine."

"It is of my son I want to speak to you," said Lady Markham, seizing this easy means of introducing her subject. "Mr. Spears, you know something of what he is to me—my eldest boy, the one who should be the prop of the family: to whom his brothers and sisters will look hereafter as the head of the family."

"Ay, that's just it," said the revolutionary. "Why should they look to him? What is there so creditable in being the eldest son? It was no thanks to him. He was not born first for any merit of his. Far better to teach them to depend on themselves—to give them their just share—to make no eldest sons."

"As if that were possible," Lady Markham said, with a soft smile at this theoretical folly. "One must be the eldest, whatever you say; and if any harm were to happen to us," she added, after a pause, raising her beautiful head, "I have no fear that Paul would give up his position then. If we were to become poor, to lose all we have—such things have happened, Mr. Spears—my boy would not find it hard to remember to take up his duties as the eldest son!"

"Ah!" said Spears in involuntary sympathy. Then he added with again the same good-humoured smile, "There now, that is how you get the better of us, you aristocrats. You are terribly cunning in argument, my lady. You get over us by a suggestion of generosity when we are talking of justice. The thing will never happen, of course—not in our day, more's the pity—your money and your land will never be taken from you."

"Do you think that is a pity, Mr. Spears?"

"Well, yes," he said, laughing, "from our point of view; but it will never happen, not in our time. And even if it did happen, don't you think it would be far better to live each man for himself, and not a whole family casting themselves on the shoulders of your son Paul?"

"My son Paul," said Lady Markham, in a low voice, looking at him through the tears in her eyes, "will be far away from us—will not be at hand to be of use or consolation in case anything should happen to us, if you and he have your will, Mr. Spears. He will be far away where he will be of no use to his family,

Such a thing might happen, though God forbid it! as that I might be left to struggle alone for my children; and Paul, my eldest, my natural help, far away, lost to me, as if he had never been."

Spears turned away while she was speaking, and returned to his bench. He cleared his throat; his face flushed; he was as much embarrassed as she had been at the beginning, and did not know how to reply.

"My lady," he said, "this is too bad; I think it is too bad. After all a man has more things to think of in this world than whether his family has need of him, or if he can be of use to his mamma."

He said the last word with a semitone of ridicule, then blushed for himself as he caught her eye. Lady Markham saw her advantage. She would not let him escape.

'Are there then many things in this world that are better than being of use to your family, and helping in a hard task your mother? Do you think so, Mr. Spears? Ah, no! I am certain you don't. You are talking *au bout des lèvres*, not from your heart. If we should ever need him, Paul will be—who can tell?—thousands and thousands of miles away; and for what? Why do you want him to go with you? Why are you going? I do not know the reason. Because you are impatient, and do not like the manner in which things are arranged at home?"

"We will not enter into that, my lady," said Spears; "we will not enter into that."

He said this, half in contempt of her intelligence, which did not rise to his lofty view, half because (and this really meant the same thing) it was very difficult to explain why he thought it expedient to go away. Many motives were mingled in his resolution which he did not dwell upon even to himself. He was tired of poor work and poor pay, and the struggle of living; tired of having to manufacture pictures-frames for bread when he could have done something so much

better: and disgusted that his higher work got no real appreciation from any one. And he was tired too even of his agitation, the speeches and popular applause which were all very well for the moment, but neither seemed to convince any one, nor to affect the world at all. All this was going on day after day, week after week, but never came to anything. Often speakers whom he knew to be much inferior to himself were more warmly applauded; and some whom he considered (as other people considered him) to be stump orators and noisy demagogues, got elevated and salaried, and swaggered about in all the importance of delegates and representatives of the people, while he received no such distinction. Though this was partly his own fault through the pride and love of independence which characterised him, yet Spears felt it. It soured him, in spite of himself. All this, however, lay in his heart undivulged, except by a bitter word now and then; and what he said to himself was that the old country was thoroughly corrupt and hopeless, but that in a new country, under better conditions, life would be more worth having. Did this fine lady, who knew nothing about it, divine what was secretly shut up in his mind? He grew half afraid of her, simple and ignorant as she had seemed to him a little while before.

"Ah, Mr. Spears, let us speak of it! You forget how important it is to me. But for you, I should not run any risk of losing my boy."

"I did not propose that he should come with me. You will do me the justice to believe, Lady Markham, that I never attempted to bias him."

"To bias him," she said—"what is it then? Is it not all your doing? Why should Paul go away, but for you? He has got these notions which you have taught him into his head—"

"On the contrary," said the workman, "I have told him that were I in his place I should certainly stay in England. This is no place for a poor man who thinks

—but for a man who is not poor, who has a position like his, why, it is the ideal place. There is no aristocracy so solid as in England. I have told him so a hundred times.”

Lady Markham's face grew whiter and whiter. It did not occur to her that this very advice might be conveyed in a tone which would make Paul wildly indignant at the supposed immunity and privileged condition with which his friend credited him. Such an explanation did not occur to her. Dismay stole over her heart; it was then as Sir William thought—Paul was not telling them the truth. The cause of his wild project was not philosophy and foolish opinions, since even his leader disowned it. It was something else. Her heart sank within her, she lost the control of her better sense. “If it is not you,” she said, “who is it then—who is it, Mr. Spears? You have—a daughter?” This seemed to come from her in spite of herself.

“A daughter—I have three,” he said, “but what have they—” here he stopped, and getting up from his bench gave vent to a low whistle of astonishment and perplexity. He was as much surprised as she could be, and not much more pleased. He gazed at her a moment speechless. “Can that be so?” he said.

Impossible to sink lower than Lady Markham's heart sank—it seemed to melt away altogether in humiliation and disappointment. She looked at him piteously, the tears so gathering into her eyes that she could scarcely see his face.

“Oh, Mr. Spears,” she cried, “you know what such a connection always comes to; disappointment on both sides—the woman's as well as the man's. Whatever his feelings may be now, he would soon find out that she was not—like the women he had been used to; and she would find herself among—habits that were not congenial to her. Oh, Mr. Spears, for both their sakes—you that Paul thinks so much of, you whose

opinion he follows so meekly—oh, will you not exert your authority, and forbid it—forbid it altogether?”

Lady Markham lost control of the words she was saying. She did not think whether this was likely to be a mode of entreaty that would be grateful to him. She lost her own fine sense of what was fit and seemly, in the eagerness of the appeal which might save her boy.

He stood over her, looking at her, changed she could not tell how. His face clouded over before her eyes. At first this seemed only the effect of the tears that blinded her, but when these latter fell she became aware that the countenance which had been so good-humoured and friendly was full now of a very different sentiment. The man seemed to have expanded even in outline as he stood between her and the light.

“Forbid it, forbid it altogether!” he repeated, with a smile that seemed to freeze her. “Why?” She felt herself tremble before him as he fixed his eyes upon her. “My lady,” he said, “you forget where you are, and you forget your politeness for once. How do you know my girl is not like the women he has been used to? By God! she’s better than most he’ll meet with among your depraved and worn-out race. *My* girl! if it is true, and she likes him, do you think I would forbid it, to save your fine blood from pollution, and keep your Paul for some fine lady of the kind he’s been used to? No, not for a million of mothers—not for all the soft-spoken insults in the world.”

Lady Markham made no reply; she could not, her agitation was so great; but indignation began to steady her nerves, and give back her forces. What had she said to call for this? How dared he speak of insult, the man whom she felt she had honoured by coming to him, by appealing to him? She was not an angel, though she was a good woman, and instinctively she began to call together her faculties, to range herself, as it were, on her own side.

Apparently, however, after this outburst, Spears felt ashamed of himself. A fine sense of courtesy was in the man, almost finer than her own. He began to be ashamed of having thus violated hospitality, of having so addressed her in his own house. He turned away from her to recover himself, turning his back upon her, then came back with again a changed aspect. "I beg your pardon," he said; "I ought to have more control of myself in my own place. I don't believe it's true what you think. No, my lady, I don't mean you're saying what you don't believe—I think you're deceived. I won't ask who's told you, or how it's come into your head; I'll put it to a better test. I'll ask the girl herself."

"Mr. Spears," said Lady Markham, "you have been very rude to me; I have not insulted you, nor did I mean to do so. It never occurred to me," she added, with a fine sting in her words which penetrated through all his armour, "that I need fear anything from *you* which I should not have encountered in—another rank of life. But I do not wish to make reprisals," she said, with a faint smile, rising from her seat. "If you question your daughter on such a subject it ought not to be before me."

"My lady," cried Spears, his face full of passion, "unless it is to be open war between us it shall be before you. If there's love between them there should be no shame in it. My girl is one that can hold up her head before any on the face of the earth. It is not my beginning, but it shall be settled and cleared up on the spot. Janet! come down here, I want you," he called at the foot of the stairs.

Even in the midst of her agitation, Lady Markham had been conscious of sounds above, footsteps and young voices, one of which indeed had been persistently singing all the time, some trivial song of the moment in a clear little sweet voice, like the trill of a bird. The insignificant tune had run through all this exciting

interview, and worked itself into Lady Markham's head, and in spite of herself she stood still, not resisting any longer, turning towards the stairs involuntarily, watching for the appearance of the girl who (perhaps) was dearer to her boy than anything else, who, perhaps, was his motive for relinquishing everything else, including his mother's happiness and the comfort of his family. What woman could remain unmoved under such circumstances? Once more her heart began to beat as she turned her face towards the dingy stairs. Was it some beautiful apparition which was to appear from it, some creature such as exists in poetry, some woman for whom it would be comprehensible that a man should give up all? Lady Markham had romance enough in her to feel that this was possible, almost to wish it, while she feared it. If it were so, it would be more easy to forgive Paul. Ah, forgive him!—that was never hard; that was not the question. Our forgiveness, like a weeping angel, is it not always hovering, forestalling even the evil to be forgiven, over our children's wayward ways? But to get it out of her mind, out of her memory, that he had deceived her, that was not so easy. She, who had come in search of evidence to exonerate Paul, can any one wonder that she stood trembling, scarcely seeing, scarcely hearing, yet all eyes and ears, to receive the testimony of this indisputable witness, against whom there could be no appeal? But when the girl's foot sounded on the stair it seemed to Lady Markham that she had already given up all hope that Paul was true—provided only that this woman for whom he had compromised the honour of his word, might at least afford some justification for the sacrifice.

CHAPTER XIV.

"WHAT is it, father? do you want me?"

The girl spoke to her father, but her eyes were caught instantly by the unusual apparition of the lady in the shop. Who was she? not an ordinary customer, not anybody with an order for picture frames. A flutter awoke in Janet's breast. Was it perhaps somebody sent from the shop to offer that situation which was the dream of her fancy? a situation, she did not quite know what, varying as her hopes and sense of self-importance varied from that of a companion (which, the forewoman of the shop had told her, her manners and look were equal to—not to speak of her education) to that of a lady's maid. Emigration was not an idea which pleased Janet. She was afraid of the sea, afraid of the unknown, and not at all desirous of being always at home, shut up within the circle of family duties and companionship. She wanted to see the world, as all young people had, she thought, a right to do. To go into the wilds had no charm for her. She had grown up in the close presence of all her father's theories without being affected by one of them. She had heard him speak by the hour and had paid no attention. All his moral independence, the haughtiness of his determination to be his own master, and stand under subjection to no man, affected his child no more than to make her wish the more fervently for that "situation," which would deliver her from the monotony of these "holdings forth." Janet's ideal of a happy existence was that of a large "establishment" where there would be a crowd of servants, elegant valets and splendid butlers at the feet of the pretty maid whom nobody would be able to tell from a lady—or perhaps a chance of catching the eye of the master of one of

these fine gentlemen, who would make her a lady in earnest, with servants of her own. Nobody knew of these secret dreams which occupied her fancy, and grew and flourished in the atmosphere of the shop; but when her father called her suddenly, and she came down to see Lady Markham standing so exactly like (she thought) a lady whom the forewoman might have sent with the offer of a situation, her heart began to beat, and her head to turn round with excitement—excitement only not so great as that of the woman who stood gazing at her with wistful eyes, asking herself if this was the woman whom Paul preferred to all the world.

Janet was tall, and possessed what the people at the shop called “a lovely figure;” the mantles and jackets never looked so well as upon her. The habit of putting these garments on, and making a little parade in front of the glass to show them, which was her daily duty, had given a certain ease of carriage not usual in her class. When you are accustomed to be gazed at, whether for yourself, or what you carry on your shoulders, it takes away the native embarrassment of the self-conscious creature. She was dressed in that gown of black alpaca which is the uniform of the shops, and which did full justice to the fine lines of her form. These were not the mere slim outlines of a girlish figure which might turn to anything, but really beautiful, finely proportioned, and imposing. She came down into her father’s shop, into the line of sunshine that crossed it, with the air of a young queen. Her face, however, was not so fine. She was pale, her nose not quite so delicate, her mouth not so small as beauty demanded. Her hair was fair, with little colour in it, and affording but little relief to the forehead upon which it clustered in a wild but careful disorder, according to the fashion of the time. Lady Markham took in every line and every feature as the girl advanced: far more critically than if she had been, as Janet

thought, an intending employer did she examine this new unknown being who (was it possible?) had Paul's future in her hands. They gazed at each other, forgetting the man who stood by watching their mutual interest with what would have been amusement had he been less indignant and curious. Men and women are always so strange to each other. He looked at these two with a half-despairing, half-comic (notwithstanding his seriousness) consciousness that the ideas that were going through their minds were to him a sealed book. He did not know, poor man, that the lady, who was a stranger, was the one of the two that was comprehensible to him, and that stranger than all Greek or Latin, more mysterious than philosophy, would have been to him, had he been able to see them, the thoughts in the mind of his own child.

"I want to ask you a question, Janet. Don't be alarmed, it is not anything to frighten you," he said. "In the first place this is Lady Markham, the mother of Mr. Markham whom you have so often seen here."

Janet made a curtsy to the lady, uttering a little confused "Oh!" of wonder, and opening her eyes, and even her mouth, in surprise. Could Mr. Markham have recommended her? *Mr. Markham!* She did not know what to think. Why should he wish her to be under his mother's care? Thought goes quick at all times, quickest of all in such a crisis, when the next word may change all your prospects in life. Her mind plunged forward in a moment into a world of possibilities, while her eyelids quivered with that expression, and her mouth kept the form of the "Oh!" tremulous and astonished. The quiver communicated itself to her whole frame—what might come next?

"You must understand," said Lady Markham quickly, "that I have nothing to do with the question your father is going to ask you. It is not put in consequence of anything I have told him—nor is it put at my desire."

Spears gave a little laugh, elevating his eyebrows. Yes, this was the sort of thing to be expected. She had led him on to it, and now she protested that she had nothing to do with it—was not this the kind of tactics pursued by her class in all ages? To push the frank and honest man of the people into a corner and then to disown him. He laughed, though he had not much inclination to laugh.

"Quite right, quite true," he said; "it is for my own satisfaction entirely. Janet, nobody has ever come between you and me," the man added with a certain pathos. He looked at his daughter with a mist of honest affection and trust in his eyes, and without an idea, without a suspicion, that between him and her lay a whole world of difference, indescribable by ordinary words. "I have been father and mother both to you. Answer me, my girl, without any fear. Mr. Markham has told his family that he is going with us to Queensland. Janet, answer me plainly, is it out of love for you?"

"Father!" Janet, whose face was turned towards him, gave a sudden cry. In a moment a flame of colour went over her. She opened her eyes still wider, and her mouth, with dismay. "Oh, father! father!" she cried, in a tone of warning and alarm.

It seemed to Lady Markham that nothing more was necessary. Her limbs refused to support her any longer. She sank upon the seat which she had abandoned. The girl was afraid to speak the truth before her; but yet what doubt could there be of the meaning in her voice.

"I ask you to tell me plainly—to speak out as between you and me," said Spears. He was not slow to perceive what her tone implied, and the warning in it made him angry. "There is no reason why you should hesitate to say it. If so it is, there is nothing wrong in it as far as I can see. Blush you must, I suppose—girls cannot help it; but tell me, like an

innocent creature as you are, tell me the truth. I tell you there is nothing to be ashamed of. Is it out of love for you?"

Her thoughts rushed, tumbling over each other in a wild dance, a feverish Bacchic procession, through Janet's head. She did not mean to say, or even to imply what was not true. But such questioning could only mean one thing, that Mr. Markham had confessed to his mother that he was "in love" for her—that unthought-of, bewildering promotion was within her reach. She did not mean to tell a lie. She blushed more hotly than ever.

"Oh, father, how can you ask me such a thing—before a lady?" she said.

"Then it is true?"

Janet did not make any reply; she dropped her head with a modest grace, twisting her fingers together nervously, her whole frame quivering. It was not she that had told them anything: they had told her. Ah! she remembered now a score of little nothings. Had not he picked up her thimble for her when she let it fall? Had not he opened the door for her when she came and went? How often she had wondered how he could come night after night and day after day—for what?—to talk to father, to listen to father! Many and many a time she had wondered at, and in her heart despised, her father's disciples. It was "bosh" that he was saying, and yet these others would sit round him and take it all in. But here was something altogether different. That a young man should only have pretended to listen to father, should have come for herself all the time, was quite comprehensible to Janet. There was nothing strange even—nothing out of the way in it. It was what lovers had done from the beginning of time.

"Is that all you have got to say?" said her father. "Can't you give us any more satisfaction? Speak out when I tell you, Janet. All this time that he has been

coming here, not saying a word to you, pretending to be my disciple—" A little sting of wounded vanity was in Spears too. He did not quite like to feel that he had been deceived, that his most fervent follower was nothing but the lover of his daughter. "All this time," he repeated, "has it been for you he has been coming? That is what we want to know."

Still Janet said nothing. She stood with her eyes cast down, interlacing her fingers in and out, out and in—her mind in such a sudden heat of active operation that she had not leisure to speak. It was not the first time that the idea had presented itself to her. She had thought of it as a very desirable thing that Mr. Markham (or one of the others) should fall in love with her. But up to this moment she had not been able to see any likelihood of her desire realising itself. However, her mind leaped into instant action, supporting with a whole array of proof the suggestion so suddenly placed before her, of the truth of which she did not entertain a moment's doubt. How could she doubt it? If he had told his mother, certainly it must be true; and the other facts adapted themselves as by magic to this great central fact. As soon as she had got possession of that as a foundation, the details seemed to come at a wish, and a whole superstructure of blessedness sprang upwards towards the skies.

"I don't know what you wish me to say, father," she answered, at last, after another peremptory call. She spoke with all the modesty of conviction, for she felt now that every word was true. "There are things as a girl cannot speak about. There are a deal of things as are nothing in themselves; but still a girl knows what they mean."

These modest words gave an indescribable pang to both her hearers. As for Spears, it was all he could do not to cry out with anger and pain. To think that at this great crisis, at a moment when so much depended upon it, she should speak with such disregard of grammar,

notwithstanding all the care he had taken of her education.

"There are things as a girl cannot speak about."

He knew that this would catch Lady Markham's ears, and he felt himself humbled before her—not because of the fact, which there was no harm in, which was indeed natural enough; but that his girl should tell it in such grammar occupied Spears to the exclusion of deeper sentiment. He turned to his visitor with a conciliatory tone, and a look of deprecation as if asking her pardon.

"Well!" he said, "my lady! there does not seem to be much doubt on that point. We will have to make up our minds to it, though it is not what I could have wished, any more than you."

The very light seemed darkened in Lady Markham's eyes, the room went round with her, and she saw nothing clearly. Oh, why had she come here to make sure! Why had she not let it alone, all vague as it was! An hour ago she had thought anything better than uncertainty—but now uncertainty itself would have been a boon. She looked at Spears, catching the tone of deprecation in his voice, which seemed so natural, and made a sudden appeal to him.

"Make up our minds to it," she cried. "How is that possible? Oh, Mr. Spears, I have always thought you so superior to anything of the kind. You would not take advantage of the confidence placed in you; you would not allow my boy, because of his admiration for your talents, to ruin himself, to compromise his position, to disappoint all our hopes!"

She rose up and put out her hands, appealing—in the forgetfulness of personal despair—to his generosity, though it was against himself and his own child. The most courteous, the most considerate person will forget when it is their own dearest interests which are concerned.

His fantastic distress about the grammar went out of the man's mind. His forehead contracted, a gleam of anger came from his eyes. But he had no doubt as to

having right on his side, and he answered with dignity. "Madam," he said, "we had better understand each other. I don't want your son any more than you want my daughter; but they have their rights, and if they like each other I will not interfere."

She was driven almost wild by this reply. "Sir William will never consent—he will never consent to it," she cried.

"That's none of my business—nor my child's," said Spears. He forgot the respect with which she had inspired him. "Here's the difference between your class and mine, my lady," he said with some scorn. "I consider the one thing needful in a marriage is love—on both sides. In our rank of life we don't consider much more. We don't ask questions about a girl's ancestors or her fortune. Most likely there's none of either sort, as in this case—but where there is love, what more is wanting? You will never persuade me to interfere."

"Marriage!" she repeated, in a voice of dismay. Of course that was what it must come to. She cast a look of dismay and almost horror at the girl who would, if this were so, take her own place, and hold her position in the world. She rose up suddenly from her rude seat, feeling that her limbs still failed her, but that in any case she could stay no longer here. "Oh, there is a great deal more wanting—a great deal more," she cried. "Life is not so simple for us. A woman should know what she undertakes—what weight she will have on her shoulders. There are other things to be taken into consideration in such a life as ours."

"You think so," said Spears. What he intended to be a superior smile dwindled into something like a sneer. He did not like this assertion, which he could not contradict. After all, it was true enough that his own existence was far more elementary and primitive than the other, and he did not like the thought.

"You do not know," said Lady Markham, "you cannot understand the difficulties of people who are

looked up to by a whole district, who have the comfort of others, the very life of many in their hands. But why should I speak of this?" she said. "I thought you understood, but you do not understand. Now it is war between us, as you said. I want to harm no one, but I must do what I can for my boy."

She made them a curtsey which (for she could not be uncivil) included both father and daughter, then drew down her veil with a trembling hand and hurried away.

Spears went after her to the door. He was furious at this calm assertion of something higher, larger, and more elevated in her different rank; yet he could not help a certain reverence, an unwilling worship of the lady, of whom he had once said regretfully that nothing like her was ever produced in his own. He went to the door, and gazed after her as she went along, her steps still hurried and agitated, but her natural grace coming back to her. "Looked up to by a whole district—the comfort of others, their very life in her hands." Ah! there might be something in that after all. He felt in his own veins a fulness, a swell of rising blood as of a man able to bear others upon his shoulders, and fearing no responsibility. That should come in the new world to which he was bound. There he too would cease to be a single unit among other isolated individuals, and would become a head also, a leader, the first of a community. He felt as if she had dared him to it, and he would achieve it. But as he stood there half-angry, half-stimulated, he was aware of his daughter behind him, straining on tiptoe to look over his shoulder—and turned round, looking at her with a new principle of judgment and discrimination in his eyes.

"Was it really Lady Markham? Is she Mr. Markham's mother?" said Janet, breathless with excitement. "Oh, how pretty she must have been, father! She's not a bit nicely dressed, not what I would call equal to her situation. But she looks a real lady. Don't you

think you would know she was a real lady, whatever she had on?"

"I don't know what you mean by a real lady. You are quite as silly as the rest, you little fool."

"Oh, but you do know," cried Janet. "Miss Stichel puts on lovely things, but she never has that look. Was that the lady that was so kind to you in the country?—in that beautiful grand house?"

"Did I say she was kind to me?" said Spears, melting a little. "Well, yes, I suppose she was."

"And was it really," said Janet, drooping her head, after she had cast one keen glance at her father's face, "really—about nothing but Mr. Markham's nonsense that she came here?"

"Janet," said her father, taking her by the hand—his mind had wandered from the great question of the moment, but her words brought it suddenly back. He looked tenderly and anxiously into the girl's face, which sank before his gaze, but only with an easy blush and pleasant embarrassment. "I don't want to be inquisitorial. I don't want to pry into what is perhaps too delicate for a man's ear. But tell me if you can what you mean by Mr. Markham's nonsense? He has always seemed very serious to me. Try and tell me if you can—try and speak to me as you would have spoken if your mother had been here."

This touched her heart, for she was not a bad girl. She began to cry a little. "She would not have asked me—she would have understood," she said. "Oh, father, what can I tell you beyond what I have told you? Besides, what does it matter what I say? He must have spoke himself, or what brought the lady here?"

This seemed conclusive to Spears too. It did not occur to him that "Mr. Markham's nonsense" must mean something more than what Paul had said to his mother. He put his arm round his child, and drew her close to him. "You should not say 'he must have

spoke,' Janet—though it would seem indeed as if he had said something. She wanted me to order him off. Tell me, my girl, are you really—fond of this young fellow?" he said, with persuasive tenderness. "Don't turn your face away, there is nothing to be ashamed of. I thought you were but a child, and lo! you are a woman with lovers after you," he went on, with a smile that was pathetic. "I can't say I like it, but it's nature, and I won't complain."

"Oh don't, father," said Janet, drawing herself away. "Don't! How can I tell you—or any one?" There was just enough of feeling to give a natural air of pretty reserve and delicacy to the girlish shrinking, the quick movement she made to conceal her face from his eyes. Her voice was tremulous, her cheeks suffused with the blush of excitement and pleasant confusion. After a pause she turned half round and asked, as if avoiding a more difficult question, "Is it a very grand house? Will it come to him after? Will he be a *Sir* too?"

"If it lasts till his time," said the revolutionary, "which let us hope it will not. The chances are, that all these detestable distinctions will be swept away long before, and the wrongs of the poor be made an end of. The country will not bear it much longer."

"Oh!" cried Janet, forgetting her bashfulness, and turning upon him a face full of eager vehemence and indignation. "I am sick of hearing of the country! What harm does it do the country? Will they have a penny the more for taking away his money? Why shouldn't I be a lady as well as any one else? To have a grand house, and a man in livery to walk behind me is what I should like above everything! I hope it will last till our time. I don't believe there will be any difference. Oh, father, won't you just give up making speeches and holding meetings, and let things be?"

"Janet!" he cried, with a flash of anger; but it seemed ludicrous after all, to attach any importance to

what such a child said. He laughed a confused and disconcerted laugh. "That doesn't come well from my daughter! And what do you know about such things? You are a little goose, and that is all about it. Besides, what does it matter? We are all going to Queensland—he, too. There will not be many grand houses, or men in livery, you baby! to be found there."

"Oh!" cried Janet, growing pale with disappointment and dismay; "but you don't think he will have to go there *now*?"

"Why not *now*? There is more reason than ever now, it appears to me."

"Oh!" cried Janet again—that stock English monosyllable expressing a whole gamut of dissatisfaction and surprise. "I thought that would only be because he thought his people would object, and didn't know what we—I—would say. He would rather go than be separated—rather than lose—us; it is easy to understand. But when he's been and told, and when his mother has come here, and when it's all in the way of being settled—Oh!" cried Janet again, with natural vehemence, "what in all the world should he go for now? Would any one go that could help it? and him that has everything he can set his face to, and sure to come into a fortune, and all made easy for him. What in all the world should he go for *now*?"

Spears stood and looked at her with a confusion that was almost stupidity. He was indeed stupefied by this extraordinary speech. Was it really what it seemed to be, a revelation of an unknown character, a new creation altogether—or was it merely the silly babble of a child?

"My girl," he said, with a tone of severity, yet still keeping the half of his smile, so confused and uncertain was he, not knowing what to think; "what is this you are saying? It is not like a child of mine. What if I were to say—as I have a good right—he *shall* come to Queensland or he shall not have you?"

"You would not have any right to say such a thing," said Janet, with decision. "Don't you tell us we've all got the right, both men and girls, to do what is best for ourselves and to judge for ourselves? and would you be the tyrant to take that from us? Oh, no, father, no! I never would have said a word but for this. Many a one has said to me, 'What are you going for? I wouldn't go a step in your place. I'd take a situation, and stay where all my friends are.' That's been said to me—times and times; and I've always said 'No. Where father goes I must go.' But, all the same, I always hated going. For one thing, I know I should be ill all the way. I hate a ship; and I hate living in the country, where you would never see so much as a street-lamp, nor hear anything but cows mooing, and sheep baaing; but I would have gone and never said a word. Only now," cried Janet, with rising vehemence, "what *would* be the good of me going, or of *him* going? If I was married I shouldn't be of no use to you; and what in all the world should take *him* there, if it wasn't following after me?"

Her father stood and gazed at her stupefied. His very jaw dropped with wonder. She had never made so long a speech in her life; but now that she had spoken, it was all as clear, as definitely settled and arranged, as pitiless in its reasonableness, as if, instead of a girl of twenty, she had been a philosopher laying down the law. All her timidity was gone. She looked him full in the face while she ended her lengthened argument. As for Spears, the very power of speech seemed to be taken from him. A sound like a laugh, harsh and jarring, came from him when she ended.

"So that's how it is?" he said, and turned and went back to his bench like a man who did not know what he was doing. Janet was glad enough to be thus released. She who had known her own sentiments all along was not startled by them as he was; but she felt that it was best now she had uttered them to let them

have time and quiet to work their necessary effect. She turned to the eight-day clock, which had been ticking solemnly all this time in the corner, with a half shriek.

"Good gracious!" she cried, "it's past nine, and me still here. Whatever will Miss Stichel say?"

CHAPTER XV.

LADY MARKHAM walked away quickly, tingling in every nerve. She felt herself insulted and betrayed. She had gone to this poor man as if he had been a gentleman, with full confidence in him, and he had not justified her faith. A poor gentleman would have felt the impossibility, would have seen that a girl of no importance, without money, or rank, or connections, could not expect to marry Paul Markham, the heir of all the family honours. A person of any cultivation would have felt this, had there been the best blood in England in his veins. But this clown did not feel it; this common workman, woodcarver, tradesman, he did not see it. He ventured to look her in the face and tell her that they must make up their minds to it.

Lady Markham was angry; she could not help it. And there was an additional sting in the situation from the fact that she felt she had brought it upon herself. She had taken an injudicious step. In her desire to relieve her own mind, she had compromised Paul. Her own alarms, her suspicion and doubt, had realised themselves. She blamed Spears all the more bitterly that in her heart she wanted not to be obliged to blame herself. But by and by the needle veered round to that point of the moral compass which in a candid mind it is so ready to stop at, self-accusation. Why did she give this man the occasion of insulting her, and the girl the occasion of defying her? It was her own fault.

She ought not, above all, to have compromised her son. This became the most terrible thought of all as she dwelt upon it. Instead of doing good she had done harm; instead of relieving Paul from the influence of the demagogue, she had riveted and strengthened his connection with the demagogue's family who were worse, much worse than himself. Was it possible that Paul, *her* son, the brother of Alice, could have chosen from all the world such a girl as Janet Spears? Her heart thrilled with the wonder of it, the disappointment of it. Was that all he could find in woman? and she herself had helped to cement the tie between them. How could she ever forgive herself? She walked along quickly, recovering her outward composure, but more and more troubled in mind as she thought upon what she had done. Why did she go? how, she asked herself, being, like most women, ready to distrust herself and give in to the common opinion on the subject whenever anything went wrong with her—how could she forget that it was always dangerous for a woman to interfere? She was in the very deepest of these painful thoughts, angry with herself, and deeply distressed by the apparent consequences of her ill-advised mission, when, turning the corner of the little street which brought her into one of the larger thoroughfares, she suddenly, without any warning, found herself face to face with Paul. The surprise was so great that she had no time to put on any defences, to prepare for questions and astonishment on his side. They met without a moment's warning, the two people who might have been supposed least likely to encounter each other at such a time and place.

"Paul!" she cried, with a sensation of fright. And he stopped, looked at her sternly, and cast a jealous inquiring look along the street by which she had so evidently come.

"Mother! what are you doing here?" he said.

"I came out—to take a walk, as it was so fine

a morning," she said, forcing a smile. Then Lady Markham came to herself and perceived the folly of false pretences. "No—I will not try to deceive you, Paul. I have been visiting Mr. Spears," she said.

"Visiting Spears!"

"Yes; what is there wonderful in that?—you brought him to visit me. Other people may blame me for it, but I don't see how you can. I had a kind of faith in him."

"You *had*; has it been disappointed then, mother, your faith?"

"Yes," she said with a sigh. "No doubt it was foolish. A man of his class—must feel like his class no doubt. It was foolish on my part."

"What was there," said Paul, with a sort of contempt which he hid under exaggerated politeness, "that Lady Markham could want with a man of his class—with a demagogue and Radical?"

"Paul," she said, her voice faltering a little, "it does not become you, however wise and superior you may feel yourself, to assume this tone to your mother. This is to change our positions altogether. I have done a thing which has proved ill-advised and may turn out badly, but I did it for the best. I will not hide it from you who are the chief person concerned. I went to ask him to use his influence with you, my own having failed, to induce you to think a little of your actual duties to your family. He did not take the same view of it as I do, which perhaps was natural; and I saw, though without wishing it," she added, in a still more tremulous tone, "the—young woman——"

"What young woman?" His voice was angry, almost threatening. He came a step nearer, and stood over her with a cloud upon his face. "What young woman is it? whom do you mean?"

"It is a poor thing to make a mystery of it when it has gone so far. I confess my mistake, and why should you conceal your intentions on your side? This can

only have the effect of making everything worse. I was made to see her against my will, and to hear from her own lips——”

“Mother!” cried Paul, violently, stopping her. Then he said, endeavouring again to calm himself, “I have heard often that it is only women who can be thoroughly cruel to other women.”

“Then you have heard what is false, Paul, what is entirely and cruelly false; though you boys toss about such accusations at your pleasure, insulting the women who bear with you, and suffer for you. I tell you because I feel it would have been wiser had I taken no part in the matter; had I kept away; said nothing, and done nothing.”

“And I tell you——” cried Paul, in vehement indignation; then he stopped short and cried out with an anxious voice, “Mother, what is it you have done?”

“Everything that is unwise,” she said. “I have been rebuffed by your friend. I will tell you the truth, Paul. When he said that he had no wish to have you as a fellow emigrant, I, in my folly, asked, Was it his daughter? And she was not so reticent as you are. She owned that it was so. She was more frank than you are; and to do him justice I will allow that her father looked as much surprised as I.”

“She owned it was so!” Paul’s face became ghastly in the morning light. Then after a minute’s blank silence, he said, with a harsh laugh, “Surprised? Yes, her father might be surprised; but why you? You seem to have been the only person who knew all about it, who had got it all cut and dry to be produced at a moment’s notice. Oh, mother!” he cried, bitterly, “your morning’s work will cost me dear—it will cost me dear!”

Lady Markham stood with bowed head to receive her son’s reproaches. “I was wrong,” she said; “I was wrong. Oh, Paul, my dearest boy, come home with

me; let us talk it all over; let us think of everything! If you knew how hard it is for me to oppose you! and all the more when your heart is engaged. Am I one to set myself against love?" She blushed as she looked at him with a woman's reverence for the centre of all affections, and a mother's shamefacedness in opening such a subject with her son. "But, Paul, there are so many things—oh, so many things to think of! and you are so young—and——"

"Mother, stop!" he said, "your arguments have nothing to do with me; they are wrong altogether. If my life is spoiled, it will be your doing; not mine, but yours—not mine, but yours."

Lady Markham lifted her head with the surprise and something of the indignation of a person unjustly accused. "This is going too far," she said. "I have been wrong, but to throw the total blame upon me is unreasonable. In this, as in other things, nobody could harm you; nobody could make your position worse, if you had not risked and lost it yourself."

There were few passengers in the streets, silent and semi-deserted as always in summer, and yet more because it was still so early. The two figures which stood there together breaking the sunshine were almost the only people visible, and the closeness of the discussion between them had hitherto been witnessed by nobody; just at this point, however, some one issued suddenly from the gate of one of the colleges near, and came down the steps into the street. They were scared by the appearance of any one in this dreary city, and it was not expedient that the warmth of their conversation should be apparent to others.

"Walk along with me," she said. "Do not let us stand here."

Paul looked round him for a moment on either hand. On one side was the narrow street in which Spears lived, the line of colleges and better houses on the other. Lady Markham's face was turned towards the

better side. This was enough to decide him, foolish as he was. He turned the other way.

"What is the good of discussing—of talking over? All the harm is done that can be done," he said, with a wave of his hand. Then he crossed the road quite suddenly, leaving his mother standing looking after him. Very miserable was the young man as he went away. He went down Spears' street, but he had no intention of going to see Spears. Everything seemed against him. The best thing for him to do, he thought, would be to get out of sight of everybody—to fly from the evils of fate that were gathering round his feet. What had he done to be caught like this in a tangle which he had not himself sought, from which indeed he had always done his best to keep free? It was no doing of his: chance and his parents had done it, and the detestable conventionalities of society, which made it impossible for a man to be civil to a girl out of his own class without laying himself open to remark. If he had not met her here, yesterday, so innocently, without premeditation! Already, by the folly of everybody concerned, this girl had got to be *her* to the young man; no name needed to distinguish the creature in whose hands some blind hazard seemed to have placed his life. Blind hazard—aided by his father and mother. How bitter were his thoughts as he went on. What was he to do? She had owned to it. Half he hated her for being so foolishly deceived, half his heart melted to her for the deception which only some latent tenderness could have produced. Must he wring the girl's heart by making it all plain to her, and humble her in her own eyes? or must he accept a position he had not sought, which he no more desired than they desired it, and of which he saw all the inappropriateness, all the disadvantages? As he went on with that cruel question in his mind, there rose out of the morning air, appearing not much less suddenly than his mother had done, running towards him, the figure of the girl of whom he

was thinking. To Paul it was as if his thoughts had taken shape. She came towards him, not seeing him, with all the ease of motion which unconsciousness gives—tall and graceful in her plain black gown. The girl's head was full of a subdued triumph, but for the moment all she was consciously thinking of was how to get to her shop as quickly as possible. She ran like another Atalanta, skimming along the unlovely street, her feet scarcely seeming to touch the ground. This sudden apparition filled Paul with excitement. She had changed to him altogether since yesterday, when she was nothing but Spears' daughter. Now she was suddenly identified, separated from all the world, and become herself. How could he help but be interested in her? She had owned to it. To what had she owned? It seemed for the moment almost a relief, bitterly as he resented her introduction into his life, to turn to her, who knew none of the complications involved, who was unaware of his fury and indignation against everybody round him—to turn to her, whose mind must be entirely single and simple, torn by no conflict. He did not know why he wanted to speak to her, what he wanted to say to her; but he stepped into her way with a certain imperiousness, making her stop short in her rapid career. Janet, thus arrested, gave a sudden cry. She stopped, the breath coming quick on her lips, and put her hand to her breast; her heart gave a sudden leap, the colour flew over her face in a sudden wave of crimson.

"Oh, Mr. Markham!" she said.

"Where are you going so fast?" Somehow it seemed to him, with a half-consolatory sense of proprietorship, that here was a creature who belonged to him, who would find no fault with him as the others did, who was his. He put himself in her way, stopping her—not as if by accident, but of set purpose—assuming the right which she for her part never resisted. There were troubles and difficulties with every one else;

but with her no difficulties, no troubles. She acknowledged his sway at once, stopped herself, blushed, and drooped her head. There was no question of approving or disapproving here. She answered his voice instantly, like a slave. There are many people who only see a thing in its best aspect when it becomes their own. For the moment Paul Markham became one of those. He had never thought her so handsome before ; perhaps indeed in all her life she had never been so handsome as when she stopped all blushing and glowing at his call, acknowledging in her every look the proprietorship which it gave him a sort of pleasure to claim. "Where are you going so fast ?" he said.

"Oh, Mr. Markham, I am in a great hurry ! I don't know what Miss Stichel will say : I never was so late before in my life !"

"What has kept you so late ?"

He was far more imperious in his tone than he had ever been when she was nothing to him. Then he had been courtly and polite, frightening the girl with a courtesy which she did not understand. She liked this roughness much better. It meant—it would be impossible to tell all it meant.

"I was kept by—visitors. Oh, Mr. Markham ! don't keep me any longer now. I don't know what Miss Stichel will say to me. She will be so angry."

"She must not be angry. How does she dare to show her anger to you ? You had visitors. I know : my mother."

"Oh, Mr. Markham !" Janet said again, faintly, drooping her head ; and then there was a momentary pause.

"I know," he said.

He did not know, and could not tell afterwards by what impulse he did it. Some infatuation took possession of him. He took her hand in the middle of the street, in sight of any one that might be looking. There was nobody looking, which vexed Janet, but he

did it without thought of that. It would have made no difference if all the world had been there.

"That is how it is, I suppose," he said, holding her hand. And then he added, somewhat drearily, "If there is anything wrong in it, it is their own doing, there is always that to be said."

This somewhat chilled Janet, who expected a warmer address; but she reflected that the street was scarcely a place for love-making; and Miss Stichel, though not so important as usual, had still to be considered.

"Let me go, please, Mr. Markham," she said; "I mustn't be late: for whatever may happen afterwards I am still their servant at the shop."

He dropped her hand as if it burnt him, and grew red with anger and uneasy shame.

"This must not be," he said. "I will go and speak to Spears."

Though he was so firm in his democratic principles, the idea that any one connected with himself should be under the orders of a mistress galled him beyond bearing. It was a thing that could not be.

"It will not be for long," Janet said, cheerfully.

She, for her part, rather liked the shop. It was more cheerful than the other shop which was home.

"I cannot suffer it," he said, "for another day. I will speak to Spears."

This was all he said, but he kept standing there looking at her with eyes which were more investigating than admiring. If he had nothing more to say than this, why should he keep her standing there and expose her to Miss Stichel's scolding? But she did not like to burst away as she would have done from a less stately wooer. She was much intimidated by a lover like Paul, though very proud of him. She stood with her eyes cast down, waiting till he should let her go free. The thing that would have made Janet most happy would have been that he should walk to the shop with her, showing that he was not ashamed of

her, and give her the pride and glory of being seen by the other young ladies in company with the gentleman she was going to marry, the gentleman who had vowed that she should not remain there—not another day. This would have been the natural thing to do, Janet thought. But it did not seem to occur to Paul in the same light. He looked at her, examining her appearance with anxious and critical, yet with very sober and calm inspection. They were neither of them so happily fluttered, so excited as they might have been. She was not exacting, did not ask too much; and he was critical with the discrimination of a superior, a judge whose powers of judgment were biassed by no glamour of partiality.

"We shall see each other later in the evening. I will not detain you longer," he said, in a tone of gentle politeness.

He even gave a little sigh of relief as he turned away. Janet, not knowing whether she was more sorry or glad to be liberated, cast more than one furtive glance behind her at his departing figure. But it did not seem to have occurred to Paul to look after her. He walked on stately and straight, turning neither to one side nor the other, towards Spears's shop. He had not meant to go, but neither had he intended any of the other things that had come to pass. Fate seemed to have got possession of him. He walked into the shop with the same straightforward steady tread, not as usual, that was impossible. Most likely there would have to be something said—but for that, too, he felt himself ready, if need were.

Spears was no longer working at the simple work of his picture-frames. He had thrown them into a heap—all the little bits of carved work which he had been glueing and fitting into each other—and with a large sheet of paper on the table before him was drawing with much intentness and preoccupation. He had set the plume of the foxglove upright before him, and

was bending his brows and contorting both limbs and features over his drawing as he had done over the lily he had designed for Alice. The handful of coloured gladiolus which had been lying on the table he had pushed impatiently aside, and they lay at his feet, here and there, scattered under the table and about the floor like things rejected, while he drew in the foxglove boldly with a blue pencil. All his soul seemed to be in his drawing. He scarcely took any notice of Paul—a half glance up, a hurried nod, and that was all. Presently, however, he took up one of the gladiolus stalks and laid it tentatively across the foxglove; then with a pshaw! of angry impatience tossed it away again.

"That won't do," he said, half to himself, "none o' that. Nature will not stand it. The free-growing, wild thing is grand, but that poor stiff, conventional rubbish, manufactured out of some gardener's brains, out of his bad dreams, is good for nothing; and it's everywhere the same, so far as I can see. Things must be wedded after their kind."

"Do you mean that for me, Spears?"

"Do I mean that for you? Which are you? the grand tower of the foxglove that's good for everything—strength and continuance and beauty—or that poor spiky trash? I don't know. I mean nothing that I don't understand."

Then there was silence once more. Paul took up some of the bits of uncompleted work and fixed them together. He would not open the subject, but he knew Spears well enough to know that it must have been some great agitation which had driven him away from his pot-boiling to the work of designing. That was not a work that would ever "pay." The frames answered the purpose of daily bread; but the designs into which all the rude artist's soul was thrown were not profitable. A few of the young men who were his friends had bought some plaques and panels of his finer original work; but such purchasers were few and

far between; and to spend a whole morning making a design for one of these delicate unprofitable carvings showed that the workman had certainly for the moment lost command of himself.

After a few minutes, during which he measured the little lathes together and fitted them carelessly, Paul went quietly to the back of the room, and taking an old coat which hung there put it on and sat down to do the work which the other had left undone. This was not a kind of work he had ever attempted before. He had been a student of carving, not because of any natural impulse towards the art, but partly for Spears's company, partly in order to be able to aid in some small way his struggle for a living. This eventful morning brought him a new impulse. While his master laboured impetuously at his drawing, Paul took the humbler work in hand. After all the distraction that had been in his mind, there was something in this homely effort that soothed him. Cast upon it on all hands, in all ways, it was a sort of relief to him to identify himself altogether with this other sphere, which he had chosen and sought out, yet into which he had never cast himself so completely, so fully, as his own family had cast him. He smiled at this within himself, as he began to work at Spears's everyday vulgar work. Well! if they would have it so, so be it! He had played with the notion of equality, of democratic simplicity, with the doctrine that it was every man's duty to earn his own living, and give up to humanity the full enjoyment of the land and accumulations of money, which no individual had a right to retain. All this he had held hotly in theory; but in the meantime had lived in his college rooms, and according to his natural position—an anomaly which only now appeared to him in its full vividness. Yes, now he saw it. He smiled to himself, no longer with bitterness, with a lofty disdain of his own past, of all his traditions, of his family, which by way of opposition and resistance to his purpose and

principles had pushed him over the verge on which he had been hesitating. Perhaps but for them he might still have hesitated before he took the final step. It was they who had decided it, who had given him the last impulse. He smiled with a sense of the weakness of efforts which thus naturally balked themselves, feeling superior in his calm certainty of decision to all these agitations. Yes, it was over; there was no longer any question of what might or might not be. His fate was settled; he was a member of Spears's family, not of Sir William Markham's. That sense of calm which follows a great decision, and at the same time of proud resignation which succeeds a sacrifice exacted, calmed his mind. Somehow, Paul could not have told how, he felt himself a sort of sacrificial offering to justice and nature, making the most eloquent of protests against wrong, tyranny, injustice, and everything that was evil in society. With the dignity of a noble victim, and with a consciousness of innate, inborn, but most illogical superiority to fate, he drew the glue-pot and the tools towards him, and began to do the workman's work. Nothing could have been more illogical; for the superiority of labour was one of the first principles of his creed, and to make pictures-frames was a respectable occupation by which a man might live. Yet it was with a smile of unspeakable superiority that he began his first day's real work, enjoying the sensation of voluntary humility, of doing what it was beneath him to do.

Thus they went on in silence for some time: Paul working clumsily enough, with a sense of the humour implied in his adoption of the trade, which made it amusing in its novelty and inappropriateness, but which was most unlike the steady devotion of a man who felt this work to be his duty; while Spears pursued his with a fury of invention which denoted the perturbation of his mind. He flung the drooping bells of the foxglove upon his paper and erected its splendid stalk

with an energy and force which was like a defiance, holding the somewhat coarse blue pencil in his hand like a sword, screwing his mouth and putting his limbs into every contortion possible, as he sat, with his stool pushed as far as might be from the table, and all the upper part of his person overhanging it. If it had been an eagle or a lion he was drawing the force and expression of his whole figure would have been more appropriate. As it was, the foxglove bristled with a kind of scornful defiance, yet drooped with something of melancholy, as an eagle might have done in all its pride of strength, yet with the pathos of all speechless creatures in its eyes. In this particular, though he was an actor, he was speechless as the eagle or the wildly noble flower. He had seen a sight which had taken all speech out of him, as it might have done from Shakespeare. He had seen a something unknown, a small, vulgar, incomprehensible spirit, to him unrecognisable, a thing out of his cognisance, looking at him through the eyes of his child. What could he say to such a revelation? Nothing. It took his voice from him and almost his breath. He had not been able to endure the placid work which left him free for thought. Say that his designing did not reach a very ethereal point of art; but it was the highest exercise of skill to him. He flung himself upon the paper, thrusting away all the painful enlightenments and contradictions of his life as he thrust away the gay-coloured spike of the gladiolus. He would have crushed them under foot if he had been able, but this he could not do. They would not disappear from his memory as the others did from his table. Thus he worked on, with a fervour which was almost savage, while Paul, with a proud smile on his face, handled the glue-pot. After a while the mere sense of companionship mollified the elder man. He was wounded, and wanted just such soothing as the sight of his disciple sitting quietly by gave him. His work grew less firm, his hand less rigid; the great

pencil ceased to dig into the paper with its violent lines. Insensibly the softening went on. First, he threw a hasty glance from beneath his bushy eyebrows at the young man tranquilly seated near him. Then his fiery inspiration slackened; he paused to look at his model, to devise the next line, and doing so let his eyes rest upon Paul with a growing softness. At last he got up, threw down his pencil, and coming up to his companion struck him on the shoulder.

"Well!" he said. "Boy! So that was how it was. You listened to the father—old fool! but your thoughts were with the girl. That was how it was." This was not the thing that gnawed at Spears's heart, but he put it forward by way perhaps of persuading himself, as we all do sometimes, that it was the lesser matter that hurt him most.

Paul paused in his work, and looked up. His face was very serious, with none of that glow of happiness in it which belongs to an accepted lover—as the man beside him, who had been a true lover, himself, was quick to see.

"Who said that? Not I, Spears—not I."

"Who said it? Well, I cannot tell you. The women among them; they have their own way of looking at things."

And then the two men paused, looking at each other. This was the moment in which it was natural that Janet's lover should make his own explanation to the father of the girl whom he loved. The whole life of two people at least, and of many more in a secondary point of view, hung upon Paul's lips, to be decided by the next impulse that might move him, by the next fantastic words which, out of the mist of unreal fact in which he had got himself enveloped, he might be moved to say.

CHAPTER XVI.

AT Markham Chase there had been great wonder and consternation at the sudden departure of the elders of the family. Bell had been called to her mother's room in the morning, and the morals of the house, so to speak, placed in her hands. She was thirteen, a great age, quite a woman. "Harry will help you: but he is careless, and he is always out. You will promise to be very careful and look after everything," Lady Markham had said. Bell, growing pale with the solemnity of this strange commission, gave her promise with paling cheek, and a great light of excitement in her eyes; and when they heard of it, the others were almost equally impressed. "There is something the matter with Paul," Bell said; and when the carriage drove away the solemnity of the great house all to themselves made a still greater impression upon them. It is true that Mrs. Fry showed signs of thinking that she was the virtual head of the establishment, and Brown did not pay that deference to Bell's orders which she expected as mamma's deputy to receive; but still they all acknowledged the responsibility that lay upon them to conduct themselves better than girls and boys had ever conducted themselves before. The girls naturally felt this the most. They would not go out with their brothers, but stayed indoors and occupied themselves with various rather grimy pieces of needlework begun on various occasions of penitence or bad weather. To complete them felt like a proper exercise for such an occasion; and Bell caused the door to be shut and all the windows in front of the house. She and Marie established themselves in their mother's special sanctuary—the west room; where after a while the work languished, and where

the elder sister, with a sense of seniority and protection, pointed out all the pictures to Marie, and gave her their names. "That is me, when I was a baby," said Bell, "just below the Raffle."

"The Raffle," said Marie. "I thought a raffle was a thing where you drew lots."

"So it is," said the elder with dignity, "but it is a man's name, too. It is pronounced a little different, and he was a very fine painter. You know," said the little instructress with great seriousness, "what the subject is—the beautiful lady and the little boy?"

"I know what they all are quite well," said Marie, impatient of so much superiority; "I have seen them just as often as you have. Mamma has told me hundreds of times. That's me too as well as you, underneath the big picture, and there's Alice, and that's papa—as if I didn't know!"

"How can you help knowing Alice and papa; any one can do that," said Bell; "but you don't know the landscapes. That one is painted by two people, and it is called Both. At least, I suppose they both did a bit, as mamma does sometimes with Alice. There is some one ringing the bell at the hall door! Somebody must be coming to call. Will Brown say 'My lady is not at home,' or will he say 'The young ladies are at home,' as he does when Alice is here? Oh, there it is again! Can anything have happened? Either it is somebody who is in a great hurry, or it is a telegram, or, Marie, quick, run to the schoolroom and there we can see."

As they neared the hall they ran across Brown, who was advancing in a leisurely manner to open the door. "Young ladies," said Brown, "you should not scuttle about like that, frightening people. And I wonder who it was that shut the hall door."

Bell made no reply, but ran out of the way, and they reached the schoolroom window in time to see what was going to happen. At the door stood some

one waiting. "A little gentleman" in light-coloured clothes, with a large white umbrella. There was no carriage, which was one reason why Brown had taken his time in answering the bell. He would not, a person of his importance, have condescended to open the door at all but for a curiosity which had taken possession of him, a certainty in his mind that something of more than ordinary importance was going on in the family. The little gentleman who had rung the bell had walked up the avenue slowly, and had looked about him much. He had the air of being very much interested in the place. At every opening in the trees he had paused to look, and when he came to the open space in front of the house, had stood still for some time with a glass in his eye examining it. He was very brown of hue, very spare and slim, exceedingly neat and carefully dressed, though in clothes that were not quite like English clothes. They fitted him loosely, and they were of lighter material than gentlemen usually wear in England; but yet he was very well dressed. He had neat small feet, most carefully *chaussés*; and he had carried his large white umbrella, lined with green, over his head as he approached the door. When Brown threw the great door open, he was startled to see this trim figure so near to him upon the highest step. He had put down his white umbrella, and he stood with a small cardcase between his finger and thumb, as ready at once to proclaim himself who he was.

"Sir William Markham?" he asked. The little cardcase had been opened, and the white edge of the card was visible in his hand.

"Not at home, sir," said Brown.

"Ah! that's your English way. I am not a novice, though you may think so," said the little gentleman. "Take in this card and you will see that he will be at home for me."

"Beg your pardon, sir," said Brown. Though he

had no objection to saying "not at home" when occasion demanded, he felt offended by being supposed to have done so falsely when his statement was true. "Master is not a gentleman that has himself denied when he is here. When I say not at home, I mean it. Sir William left Markham to-day."

"Left to-day!—that is very unlucky," said the stranger. He stood quite disconcerted for the moment, and gnawed the ends of his moustache, still with the card half extended between his finger and thumb. "You are sure now," he added in a conciliatory tone, "that it is not by way of getting rid of intruders? I am no intruder. I am—a relation."

"Very sorry, sir," said Brown; "if you were one of the family—if you were Mr. Markham himself, I couldn't say no different. Sir William, and my lady, and Miss Alice, they went to Oxford this morning by the early train."

"Mr. Markham himself—who is Mr. Markham?" he said, with a peculiar smile hovering about his mouth. "I am—a relation; but I have never been in England before, and I don't know much about the family. Is Mr. Markham a son, or brother—perhaps brother to Sir William?"

"The eldest son and heir, sir," said Brown, with dignity. "You'll see it in the *Baronetage of England* all about him, 'Paul Reginald, born May 6, 18—.' He came of age this year."

The brown face of the stranger was full of varying expression while this was said—surprise, a half amusement, mingled with anger; emotions much too personal to be consistent with his ignorance of the family history. Strange, when he did not know anything about it, that he should be so much interested! Brown eyed him very keenly, with natural suspicion, though he did not know what it was he suspected. The little gentleman had closed his card-case, but still held it in his hand."

"So," he said, "the heir; then perhaps he is at home?"

"There is nobody at home but the young ladies and the young gentlemen," said Brown, testily. "If any of the grown-up ones had been in the house or about the place, I'd have said so."

Brown felt himself the master when the heads of the family were away, and this sort of persistency did not please him.

"I'd like to see the young ladies and gentlemen," said the stranger. I'd like to see the house. You seem unwilling to let me in; but I am equally unwilling to come such a long distance and then go away ——"

"Well, sir," said Brown, embarrassed, "Markham Chase, though it's one of the finest places in the county, is not a show-place. I don't say but what the gardener would take a visitor round the gardens, and by the fish-pond, and that, when the family are away; but it has never been made a practice to show the house. And it cannot even be said at present that the family are away. They've gone on some business as far as Oxford. They might be back, Sir William told me, in two days."

"My man!" said the stranger, "I can promise you your master will give you a good wiggling when he hears that you have sent me away."

"A good—what, sir?"

Brown grew red with indignation; but all the same a chill little doubt stole over him. This personage, who was so very sure of his welcome, might after all turn out to be a person whom he had no right to send away.

"I said a wiggling, my good man. Perhaps you don't understand that in England. We do in our place. Come," he said, drawing out the card, and with it a very palpable sovereign, "here's my name. You can see I'm no impostor. You had better let me see the house."

The card was a very highly glazed foreign-looking piece of pasteboard, and upon it was the name of Mr. Augustus Markham Gaveston, at full length, in old

English characters. And now that Brown looked at him again, he seemed to see a certain likeness to Sir William in this pertinacious visitor. He was about the same height, his eyes were the same colour, and there was something in the sound of his voice—Brown thought on the whole it would be best to pocket the indignity and the sovereign, and let the stranger have his way.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he said; "Sir William didn't say nothing to me about expecting a relation, and I'm not one that likes to take liberties in the absence of the family; but if so be as your mind is set upon it, I think I may take it upon me to let you see the house."

"I thought we should understand each other, sooner or later," said the stranger, with a smile. "Sir William could not tell you, for he did not know I was coming," he said, a moment afterwards, with a short laugh. "I've come from—a long way off, where people are not—much in the way of writing letters. Besides, it is so long since he's seen me, I dare say he has forgotten me: but the first glance at my card will bring it all back."

"I don't doubt it, sir," said Brown. He had taken the sovereign, though not without doubts and compunctions, and now he felt himself half unwillingly bound to the service of this unknown personage. He admitted him into the hall with a momentary pang. "The house was built by the great-grandfather of the present baronet," he said. "This hall is considered a great feature. The pillars were brought from Sicily; they're no imitation, like what you see in many places, but real marble. On the right is the dining-room, and on the left the drawing-room. There is a fine gallery which is only used for balls and so forth ——"

"Ah—we'll take them in turn," said the little gentleman. He put down his big white umbrella, and shook himself free of several particles of dust which he

perceived on his light coat, "I'll rest here a moment, thank you," he said, seating himself in the same big chair in which Colonel Lenny had fallen asleep. "This reminds me of where I've come from. I dare say Sir William brought it over. Now fetch me some iced water or seltzer, or cold punch if you've got such a thing. Before I start sight-seeing, I'd like a little rest."

Brown stared with open mouth; his very voice died away in the blank wonder that filled him.

"Cold—punch!" he said.

The stranger laughed.

"Don't look so much like a boiled goose. I don't suppose you have cold punch. Get me some seltzer, as I say, or iced water. I don't suppose a man who has been anywhere where there's a sun can do without one of them. Oh, yes, there's a little sun in England now and then. Something to drink!" he added, in peremptory tones.

Brown, though he felt the monstrous folly of this order from a man who had never set foot in the house before, felt himself moving instinctively and very promptly to obey. It was the strangest thing in the world, but he did it, leaving the stranger enthroned in the great chair of Indian bamboo.

Mr. Augustus Markham Gaveston, however, had no inclination to sleep. He sat sunk in the chair, rubbing his hands, looking about him with his little keen blue eyes.

"So this is Markham Chase," he said to himself. His eyes shone with a mischievous eager light. There was a little triumph in them and some amusement. Though he was far from being a boy, a sort of boyish gleam of malicious pleasure was in his face, as if he had done something which it had not been intended or desired that he should do, and thus had stolen a march upon some one in authority. He pulled off his gloves in a leisurely way, finger by finger, and threw them into his hat, which he had placed at his feet. Then he

rubbed his hands again, as if ready for anything or everything.

"The dining-room to the right, the drawing-room to the left, and a fine gallery—for balls and that sort of thing," he repeated, half under his breath.

The little girls had watched anxiously from the schoolroom window as long as there was anything to see. They had seen the little gentleman come in, which filled them with excitement. It was not a telegram, so there was nothing to be afraid of. Their hearts jumped with excitement and wonder. Who could it be?

"I ought to go and see what he wants," said Bell. "Mamma left the charge of the house to me."

"Oh, Bell—a strange gentleman! you would not know what to say to him, though it is only a little gentleman," said Marie.

"Oh yes, I know quite well. I shall ask him if he wants papa, and that I am so sorry there is no one at home—and could I tell papa any message? that is what Dolly Stainforth says."

"She is seventeen," said Marie; "and you—you are only so little—he will laugh at you. Bell, don't go. Oh, I don't like to go —"

"He is little, too," said Bell. "You can stay away if you please, but I am going to see what it all means. Mamma left the charge to me."

Marie followed, shy, but curious.

"Oh, I wish the boys were here," she said.

"The boys!" cried Bell, with much contempt. "Who would pay any attention to them? But you need not come unless you like. Mamma left the charge to me."

Whether to be left alone, or to be dragged to the encounter to speak to a strange gentleman, Marie did not know which was worst. It was the first, however, which was most contrary to all her traditions. She scarcely remembered that such a thing had ever

happened. So she followed, though ill at ease, holding a corner of Bell's frock between her fingers. As for Bell, she had the courage of a lion. She walked quite boldly through all the passages, and never felt the slightest inclination to run away, till she suddenly caught a glimpse of two neat little feet, protruding from two lines of light trousers, on the other side of the hall. Then she gave a start and a little cry, and clutched at Marie behind her, who was more frightened than she.

They stopped within the door, in a sudden *accès* of fright. Nothing was visible but the grey trousers, the little feet in light cloth boots, and two hands rubbing each other; all the rest of the stranger's person being sunk in the big chair.

When he heard this exclamation, he roused himself, and turned a wideawake head in their direction.

"Ah! the young ladies!" he said. "How are you, my little dears? It is you I most want to see." And he held out to them the hands which had been seen rubbing themselves together so complacently a moment before.

"We are the Misses Markham. We are never spoken to like that," said Bell. Then she collected all her courage for the sake of her duty. "I am the eldest," she said. "Papa and mamma are gone away, if you wanted to see them; but if you have any message you wish to leave ——"

"Come here," he said. "I don't wish to leave any message. Don't be frightened. I want to make friends with you. Come here and talk to me. I am not a stranger. I am a—sort of a relation of yours."

"A relation!" said Bell. And as Brown's solemn step was heard advancing at this moment, the little girls advanced too. Brown carried a tray with a long glass upon it, a fat little bottle of seltzer water, and a large jug of claret-cup. Colonel Lenny had been very thirsty too when he fell asleep in that same chair, but

he had not been served in this way. The little girls came forward, gravely interested, and watched with serious eyes while the little gentleman drank. He nodded at them before he lifted the glass to his lips with a comical air.

"My name is Markham as well as yours," he said. "I've come a long way to make your acquaintance. This respectable person here—what do you call him, Brown?—wanted to send me away; but I hope now that you have come you will extend your protection to me, and not allow him to turn me away."

"Are you a cousin?" said Bell.

"Well—perhaps not exactly a cousin; and yet something of that sort."

"Are you one of the Underwood Markhams?" the little girl continued. "The people that nurse says would get Markham if we were all to die?"

"They must be very disagreeable people, I think," said the stranger, with a smile.

"Oh, *dreadful*! They never come here. Nurse says they were in such a way when we were all born. They thought papa was going to let them have it—as if it were not much more natural that Paul should have it! You are not one of those people, are you, Mr.—Markham? Is that really your name?"

"I am not one of those people, and my name is Gus. What is yours? I want to know what to call you, and your little sister. And don't you think you had better take me to see the house?"

"Oh," cried Bell, looking more serious than ever; "but we could not call a gentleman, quite an old gentleman, like you, Gus."

"Do you think I am an old gentleman?" he said.

"Well, not perhaps such a very old gentleman," said Bell, hesitating.

Marie, trusting herself to speak for the first time, said in a half-whisper—

"Oh, no—not very old; just about the same as papa."

The stranger burst into a laugh. This seemed to amuse him more than the humour of the speech justified.

"There is a difference," he said; "a slight difference. I am not so old as—papa."

"Do you know papa? Do you know any of them? You must have met them," said Bell, "if you are in society. Alice came out this year, and they went everywhere, and saw everybody, in society. Mamma told me so. Alice is the eldest," the little girl went on, pleased to enter into the fullest explanations as soon as she had got started. "That is, not the eldest of all, you know, but the eldest of the girls. She was at all the balls, and even went out to dinner! but then it is no wonder, she is eighteen, and quite as tall as mamma."

"Is she pretty?" said the gentleman.

He went on drinking glass after glass of the claret-cup, while Brown stood looking on alarmed, yet respectful. ("Such a little fellow as that, I thought he'd bust himself," Brown said.)

"She is not so pretty as mamma," said the little girl. "Everybody says mamma is beautiful. I am the one that is most like her," continued Bell, with naïve satisfaction. "There is a picture of her in the drawing-room; you can come and see."

"Miss Isabel," cried Brown, taking her aside. There was something important even in the fact of being taken aside to be expostulated with by Brown. "We don't know nothing about the gentleman, miss," said Brown. "I don't doubt that it is all right—still he mightn't be what he appears to be; and as it is me that is responsible to Sir William ——"

"You need not trouble yourself about that, Brown," said Bell, promptly. "Mamma said I was to have the charge of everything. I shall take him in and show him the pictures and things. I will tell papa that it was me. But Brown," she added in an undertone, certain doubts

coming over her, "don't go away; come with us all the same. Marie might be frightened: I should like you to come all the same."

Meantime the stranger had turned to Marie.

"Where do you come in the family?" he said. "Are there any younger than you?"

"No," said Marie, hanging her head. She was the shy one of the family. She gave little glances at him sidelong, from under her eyelids; but edged a little further off when he spoke.

"Are you afraid? Do you think I would do you any harm?" said the little gentleman. "It is quite the other way. Do you know I have brought some sweetmeats over the sea, I can't tell you how far, expressly for you."

"For me!" Marie was fairly roused out of her apathy. "But you didn't know even our names till you came here."

"Ah! there's no telling how much I knew," said the stranger with a smile.

He had risen up, and he was not very formidable. Though he was not handsome, the smile on his face made it quite pleasant. And to have sweetmeats brought, as he said, all that way, expressly for *you*, was a very ingratiating circumstance. Marie tried to whisper this wonderful piece of information to Bell when her interview with Brown was over. But Bell had returned to all her dignity of (temporary) head of the house.

"If you will follow me," she said, trying to look, her sister said afterwards, as if she were in long dresses, and putting on an air of portentous importance, "we will take you to see the house. Brown, you can come with us and open the doors."

The visitor laughed. He was very little taller than Bell, as she swept on with dignity at the head of the procession. Brown, not quite satisfied to have his *rôle* taken out of his hands, yet unwilling to leave the children in unknown company, and a little curious

himself, and desirous to see what was going on, followed with some perturbation. And there never was a house-keeper more grandiose in description than Bell proved herself, or more eloquently confused in her dates and details. They went over all the house, even into the bedrooms, for the stranger's curiosity was inexhaustible. He learned all sorts of particulars about the family, lingering over every picture and every chamber. When the boys came in, calling loudly for their sisters, he put his glass in his eye and examined them, as they rushed up the great staircase, where a whispered but quite audible, consultation took place.

"I say, we want our dinner," cried Harry. "We're after a wasps' nest down in the Brentwood Hollow, and if you don't make haste, you'll lose all the fun."

"Oh, a wasps' nest!" cried Bell; "but we can't—we can't: for here is a gentleman who says he is a relation, and we're showing him over the house."

"Such a funny little gentleman," said Marie, "and he says he's got some sweetmeats (what does one mean by sweetmeats?) for me."

"I don't care for your gentleman; I want my dinner," cried Harry, whose boots were all over mud from the Brentwood swamp. They both brought in a whiff of fresh air like a fresh breeze into the stately house.

"Miss Isabel," said Brown, coming forward, and speaking in a stage whisper, while the stranger, with his glass in his eye, calmly contemplated all these com-munings from above, "if the gentleman is really a relation, I don't think my lady would mind if you asked him to stay lunch."

To stay lunch! This took away the children's breath.

"It is a bore to have a man when he doesn't belong to you," said Roland.

"He looks a queer little beggar," said Harry. "I don't think I like the looks of him."

"But he is quite nice," said the little girls in a breath.

Then Bell suddenly gave a lamentable cry—

“Oh, you boys, it is no use even thinking of the wasps’ nest. We have all got to go to the rectory to the school-feast.”

This calamity put the little gentleman out of their heads. The boys resisted wildly, but the girls began to think better of it, arguing that it was a party, though only a parish party. The introduction of this subject delayed the decision of the question about lunch, until at last a violent appeal from Harry—

“I say, Brown! *can’t* we have our dinner?” brought about a crisis.

“You go and ask *him* to come, Harry,” said Bell, seized with an access of shyness, and pushing her brother forward. “You are the biggest.”

“Ask him yourself,” cried the boy. This difficult question however was solved by the little gentleman himself, who came forward, still with his glass in his eye.

“My dear children,” he said, “don’t give yourselves any trouble. I am very hungry, and when Mr. Brown is so kind as to give you your dinner, I will share it with great pleasure.” (“Cheeky little brute—I don’t like the looks of him,” said Harry to Roland. “But it was plucky of him all the same,” said Roland to Harry.) “Allow me to offer Miss Markham my arm,” the stranger added.

To see Bell colour up, look round at them all in alarm, then put on a grand air, and accept the little gentleman’s arm, was, all the children thought, as good as a play. They followed in convulsions of suppressed laughter, the boys pretending to escort each other, while Marie did her best to subdue them. “Oh, boys, boys! when you know mamma says we are never to laugh at people,” cried this small authority. But the meal thus prepared for was very successful, and the young Markhams speedily became quite intimate with their visitor. He told them he was going to stay in the village, and

Harry and Roland immediately made him free of the woods. And he asked them a thousand questions about everybody and everything, from their father and mother, to the school-feast where they were going ; but except the fact that he was staying in the village, he gave them no information about himself. This Brown noted keenly, who, though not disposed to trouble himself usually with a school-room dinner, condescended to conduct the service on this occasion, keeping both ears and eyes in very lively exercise. Brown felt sure, with the instinct of an old servant, that something was about to happen in the family, and he would not lose an opportunity of making his observations. The stranger remained until the children had got ready for their engagement, and walked with them to the village, still asking questions about everything. They had fallen quite easily into calling him Mr. Gus.

"For I am Markham as well as you," he said ; "there would be no distinction in that ;" which was another source of anxiety and alarm to Brown, who knew that on the visitor's card there was another name.

"Good-bye, Mr. Gus, good-bye !" the children cried at the rectory-gate. The village inn was further on, and Mr. Gus lingered with perfectly open and unaffected curiosity to look at the fine people who were getting out of their carriages at the gate.

"We will tell papa your message," said Bell, turning round for a last word ; "and remember you are to come again when they come home."

"Never fear ; you will see plenty of me before all is done," he said ; and so went on into the village, waving his hand to them, with his big white umbrella over his head. All the girls and boys who were going to the school-feast, stopped to look at him with wondering eyes. He was very unlike the ordinary Englishman as seen in Markham Royal. But the little Markhams themselves had now no doubt that he was a relation, for his walk, they all agreed, was exactly like papa's.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE rectory at Markham Royal was a pretty house, situated on a little elevation, with pretty lawns and gardens, and a paddock at the foot of the little height, open to the lawn, where there was a tent erected, and plenty of space for the games. Spectators of the higher class constituted quite another little party in the pretty slope of the gardens, where they were walking about in bright-coloured groups, and paying their various greetings to the rector and his daughter when the little Markhams arrived. Their appearance was a great disappointment to the company in general, and especially to Dolly Stainforth, who was the hostess and the soul of everything that was going on. The rector himself was old, and not able to take much trouble. He had a large family of sons and daughters, who were all married and out in the world, with the exception of the youngest of all, Dolly, who was a little younger than Alice Markham, and a model of everything that a clergyman's daughter ought to be. Frank, the youngest son, a young barrister, who still called the rectory home, and was generally present on all important occasions, was the only other member of the family in whom Markham Royal took any very great interest; and he was absent to-day, to the great annoyance of his sister, who all the afternoon had been looking out, shading her eyes, directly in the line of the sun, which made the highroad one white and blazing line—looking for the carriage from the Chase, which might, Dolly hoped, bring her the only compensation possible for her brother's absence. Alice was an unfailing aid in all such emergencies, and Lady Markham's gracious presence made everything go well among the great people on the lawn. Also, this time

at least, there was another possibility that made Dolly's heart beat. It had been whispered among the girls for some time past that the birthday of Alice being near, and Paul almost certain to come home for that family festivity, he might, in all likelihood, be calculated upon for the rectory too; in which case Alice and he would remain for supper afterwards, and the day would be a white day. Not many entertainments of a lively description came in Dolly's way. She had to drive out solemnly with her father now and then, and attend garden parties which were not always very amusing, but this day had been marked out as an exception to all others. After the school-feast, which was the laborious part of it, and in which she was to be helped by the people she admired and loved most in the world, there was to be the much more exquisite pleasure of the domestic party after, talks, and songs, and strolls in the moonlight, and a whole little romance of happiness. Frank and Alice, whom it would be almost delight enough to pair together, to see "taking to each other," and Paul— Perhaps it was part of Dolly's training as, in a way, mother of the parish, that she should make her little plans with extreme regularity and perfection of all the details. This anticipation had given her strength for all the preparations of the school-feast. There was no curate to take any share of the responsibility; everything came upon her own small shoulders, young and delicate as they were. But what of that! With such aid and such a recompense, Dolly did not care what trouble she took. It was her duty in any case, but duty became a kind of Paradise when pursued in company with Frank and Alice and Paul. Alas! the morning's post had brought a letter from Frank announcing his inability to appear. Was it for a serious cause which his sister could accept? Alas, no! only for a cricket match, which he preferred—certainly preferred—to the rectory lawn and Alice Markham. Frank was false, but the others must prove true.

When did any one ever know the Markhams to fail? When the four children appeared, Dolly detached herself from Lady Westland, whom with a much disturbed attention she had been entertaining:

"Why are they so late?" she cried.

"Oh, Dolly," said Bell, half pleased to be of so much importance, half sorry to convey bad news; "they are not coming at all! They have gone off to Oxford, papa, mamma, and Alice; there is something the matter with Paul."

Poor little Dolly never could tell how she bore this blow. Suddenly the whole scene became dim before her, swimming in two big tears which flooded her eyes. She had indeed said to herself that she would not "build upon" the coming of Paul; but Alice at least she had a right to build upon.

"My dear child, what is the matter?" cried Lady Westland, whose eyes were as keen as needles.

Dolly, though she was still blind with the sudden moisture, recovered her wits more quickly than she recovered her eyesight.

"I think I shall cry," she said. "I can't help it. Alice is not coming; and Alice was all my hope. There is no one such a help as she is. I don't know what I shall do without her."

It was a kind of comfort to Dolly to think that Ada Westland would be wounded by an estimate which showed how little her services were thought of; and this, perhaps, though not at all a right feeling for a good little clergywoman, helped her to recover herself, as it was so necessary she should do.

The children were assembling in the paddock, all in their best clothes, with the schoolmistress and the Sunday-school teachers, and a few favoured villagers. There was the tea to make for them, the games to organise, to keep everything going; and all the garden walks were occupied by idle people who were doing nothing to help, and from whom no help could be expected.

Her old maid, who had been her nurse, and who was Dolly's chief support in the household, and old George the old man-servant, who managed the male department at the rectory, were both required to hand tea, and attend upon these fine people, who did all they could to detain Dolly herself, stopping her as she hurried down to the field of action, to tell her that it was a pretty scene. Dolly was far too good a girl, and too thoroughly trained to the duties of her position to dwell at that moment upon her disappointment. But whenever she paused for a moment, whenever the din of the voices and teacups experienced a lull, it came back to her. Poor little Dolly ! She had everything on her shoulders.

There was a line of chairs arranged under the lime-trees on the lawn for the great people of the parish—the Trevors and the Westlands—apart from the crowd of smaller people who came and went. Among these few local magnates the rector meandered, and it was to them that old George's services were specially dedicated. They had the best of the tea, which Dolly grudged greatly, and the best position, and the best attendance ; and considered themselves to be doing a duty which they owed to the parish in thus countenancing the school-feast. They considered that they were doing their duty ; but at the same time, in the absence of anything better, they liked it as Bell and Marie did, because, such as it was, it was a party, though only a school-feast. Old Admiral Trevor was seated in the sunniest spot—for warmth, as his daughters explained, was everything to him. He sat there, cooking in the heat of the August afternoon with poor Miss Trevor close by, divided between the necessity of being close to him and the love of the grateful shade behind. The old admiral talked a great deal, mumbling between his toothless gums with the greatest energy, and very indignant when he was asked a second time what he had said. Miss Trevor, though she was deaf and used an ear-trumpet, always heard her father, and was very quick and clever in

interpreting him, so as to save what she called "unpleasantness." Beside the Trevors were the Westlands—the whole four of them—father, mother, son, and daughter. They were new people, and therefore deeply impressed with the necessity of "countenancing" the parish in which they had bought a house and park, and which they tried to patronise as if it belonged to them. They were very rising people, very rich, and fond of finding themselves in good company, even at a school-feast; for naturally such people get on much better in town, where there are all sorts of visitors, than in the country where everybody knows all about their pedigree and belongings. Dolly's only real help was Miss Matilda Trevor, the second daughter of the admiral, a plain, good woman, but so shortsighted that she had to put her nose into everything before she could see it. Some of the smaller lights of Markham, Mrs. Booth, and her niece, from Rosebank, and young Mrs. Rossiter, the doctor's wife, might have been of a little use; but their heads were turned by the offer the rector inadvertently made of the chairs reserved for the Markhams on the lawn. When they had such a chance of distinction, of making their "position" quite apparent, and showing their equality with the county people, who could wonder that these ladies threw over the children, and Dolly, though not without many compunctions? Poor ladies! they did not make very much of it; they talked to each other which they could do any day, and now and then got a word from Miss Trevor, who poked out her trumpet for the answer, frightening Mrs. Rossiter out of her wits.

This, however, accomplished Dolly's discomfiture, leaving her altogether to herself. It was a pretty scene, as everybody said. The people who were walking about the garden dropped off as the afternoon went on, but the great people sat it out; though they paused to say it was a pretty scene, they were busy with their own talk, and had nothing else to do that was of

any importance. The admiral had got into an argument with Lord Westland about the new ironclads—if argument that could be called which consisted of vituperation on the part of the old sailor and amiable remonstrances from the new lord.

“Ships,” the bigoted old seaman cried, the foam flying from his lips, “I doncall’em ships.” He ran his words into each other, which made him very difficult to understand. “Shtinking old tin-kettles, old potsh-anpans, that’s what I call ’em. Set a seaman afloat in’em shlike puttin’emdownamine. I don’ callit afloat”

“My dear sir,” said Lord Westland, blandly, “there may be something in what you say; but we might as well try to confine the waves of the sea, as a certain king did, as to keep back science. Science, admiral, must have her way.”

“Let’erhav’erway,” cried the old man, “down to the bottom if sheshamind. One good seamansh worth more ’ana shipload o’ph’losophers. Let’emman’erownships; let’em man their own ships. Crew o’ph’losophers ’shtead o’seamen. Bust their boilers’s often ’shtheylike and devil a harm.”

“He says the new ships should have crews of philosophers,” said Miss Trevor, tranquilly, putting up her hand to silence the anxious “I did not catch your last remark,” to which Lord Westland was about to give utterance. The peer shook his indulgent head.

“My dear admiral, philosophers, though it may please you and me, who are old-fashioned, to rail at them, are rapidly becoming the masters of the world.”

“Mashters-o-fiddlshticks,” said the old sailor. “Put’emdown the d——d ratholes, shee how theylikeit’emshelves. Old coalmines under water, call that a ship! None o’ God’s air, noneoGod’s light—all machines an’gasburnersh. Smash ’erownconsortsh—run everythin’ down—’chept enemish!” he sputtered forth triumphantly, with a laugh of angry triumph in his own argument.

"He says they run everything down, except the enemy," said Miss Trevor. "I should like myself to know why there are so many collisions nowadays. My father says it is all science and boilers. Why is it, Lord Westland?" And she put up that ear-trumpet, of which everybody was afraid, for her noble neighbour's use.

"Did you hear that last piece of news about the Markhams?" said Lady Westland. "All off at a moment's notice, the very day they were expected here. They really ought to have waited and showed themselves, and not given colour to all the stories that are about."

"Are there stories about? I have not heard any. Markham only came home two days ago. Do you mean about the ministry? Is it supposed to be insecure?"

"Oh no," cried Lady Westland, with an ineffable smile. "The ministry!—oh no, Mr. Stainforth; that is much too well secured with the best and most influential support. The opposition need not trouble themselves about that."

Lady Westland looked at her husband with honest admiration. He was a consistent supporter of government—and standing, as he did, with his legs wide apart and his shoulders squared, anticipating with dread the necessity of speaking into the trumpet and preparing himself for the effort, he looked a very substantial prop.

"Ah, to be sure," said the rector. "I forgot for the moment we take different sides."

"My dear rector, how you, a dignified clergyman and a man of family, can take the Liberal side!" said Lady Westland. "It seems more than one can believe. But, oh no—oh dear no! of course I would not for the world say a word to weaken old ties or change convictions. An opinion that has stood the test of years is a sacred thing. But I did not mean anything political. Don't you know, dear Mr. Stainforth, the very sad stories that are told everywhere about Paul?"

"What has Paul been doing?" said the old rector. He did not himself very much approve of Paul. Staying up to read was a new sort of idea which had not been thought of in his day. He did not much believe in young fellows reading when a set of them got together. "Much more likely they are staying up for some mischief," he had said when he heard of it, and in consequence he was not disinclined or unprepared to hear that there were stories about Paul.

"Did not you hear what he did? He brought some frightful Radical agitator, some public-house politician—so they say—to the Chase, and made poor Lady Markham take him in, and gave her all sorts of trouble. I believe Sir William has scarcely spoken to him since for being so silly. But we all know what a devoted mother Lady Markham is. For my part, I think one's husband has the first claim. And now they say he is inveigled into some engagement, and is going to be sent off to the Colonies and got rid of in that way."

"I think there must be some mistake," said the rector. "Men don't send their heirs to the Colonies, nor get rid of them, except for very serious causes."

"Oh, I am so glad you stand up for Paul! I will never believe it," said Ada Westland. "Paul inveigled into any engagement! How could you believe it, Mr. Stainforth? He is as proud as Lucifer. He thinks none of us fit to pick up his handkerchief. Oh, I know, we are all supposed to be on our promotion, waiting till he may be pleased to look at us. I—and Dolly too—but he never did condescend to look at us. If he were to marry, after that, a girl off the streets ——"

"Ada, my love, for Heaven's sake, take care how you talk!"

"Oh, there is nobody but the rector, mamma, and he knows we girls are not such fools as we are made to look. If Paul Markham were to marry that sort of person, I should laugh. It would be our revenge—

Dolly's and mine—whom he never would condescend to look at. It would be nuts to me."

"Did you ever hear anything so vulgar?" said Mrs. Booth to Mrs. Rossiter. "I never could abide that girl. They have all thrown her and themselves at Paul Markham's head. New people as they are, and shoddy people, they would give their eyes to have her married into such an old county family."

"But it is not true about Dolly," said the doctor's wife. "Dolly has not such a notion in her head. Her mind is full of the parish, and her father, and Frank. I don't believe such an idea as getting married ever crossed her mind at all."

"Hem!" said Mrs. Booth, with a doubtful little cough, "I should not like to swear to that. What did you say, Lady Westland—haven't I heard it? Well, I have heard something about strange visitors. It appears there have been several people at Markham lately whom nobody has been asked to meet."

"That is very significant; I call it very significant. When one's own friends cease to introduce their friends to us, it is a token that all is not well. Don't you think so?" said Lady Westland, softly smiling on the doctor's wife.

Mrs. Rossiter's sympathies were all with the victims who were being assailed. But the Westlands were very fine people, much more "difficult to know" than the Markhams, and the doctor had not yet got a very distinct footing at the Towers. His young wife thought of her husband's position, and acquiesced with a sigh.

"But it is not like them," she said. "The Markhams are so hospitable; they are such nice people; they are always kind."

"Yes, they ask all sorts of people. It is extraordinary the people one meets there," Lady Westland said; which made Mrs. Rossiter's cheek flame, and was a very just recompense to her for her infidelity. And then there was a pause, and the boom of Admiral

Trevor's bass, and the titillation of his sh's came in like the chorus. He was still holding forth on the subject of the *Devastation*.

"I don't wish 'em any harm," said the old sailor; "I wish-e-may all go down in port like that one t'other day. Wish-em wher-er shure to be looked after. No, blesh us all—no harm!"

Meanwhile the games were going on merrily enough in the paddock. Dolly flew about for three people. She set the little ones afloat in one game, and the big ones in another. The Markhams were still her best allies, Bell throwing herself into the rounds and dances of the infants with characteristic vigour; but Harry and Roland stood apart and whispered to each other, with their hands in their pockets. They would have taken the boys off to play cricket, had that been in the programme.

"No, I will not have it," Dolly said. "For once in a way they shall be together. It's bad enough when they grow up, when all the boys troop off for their own pleasure, and never think what the girls are doing. It's time enough to break up a party and make sects when they're grown up," Dolly said. The boys stared, and did not understand her. But it was natural enough that she should be angry. Frank's cricket match was rankling in his sister's mind. And Dolly thought that "for once in a way" Paul Markham might have thought of old friends. It was sure to be his fault that even Alice had failed her; Dolly had no idea how it could be his fault, but she was sure of it. Her heart was full of fury as she flew about from one group of children to another, struggling against their tendency to fall into detached parties, and let the amusements flag. "It is far more their parish than it is mine; they will always have it," she said to herself. When it began to be time for the children to disperse, and the conclusion of her labours approached, she was so far carried away by her feelings as to forget that the Miss Trevor who

had helped her with the tea, but had been standing helplessly about since, always in the way, was the short-sighted one, and not the deaf one. "Oh, I wonder why all these people don't go away?" she cried. "Haven't they got dinners waiting at home? Why do they stay so long? I am sure I don't want to have to go and entertain them after the children go away." And then poor Dolly recollected with horror that Mrs. Booth and Mrs. Rossiter were to stay for a high tea, and that the doctor was to come in to join them. "Oh," she cried, in her vexation, "I shall not get rid of them to-night."

"Of whom are you speaking, my dear?" said Miss Trevor, astonished—which brought Dolly to herself; and, fortunately, Miss Trevor could not see that it was her own party, and the rest of the people on the lawn, whom Dolly meant. "I am afraid we must be going very soon," she added, with regret. "I am sorry not to stay and help you to the end. But dear papa must not be exposed to the night dews."

Dolly had to marshal the children for a march round, leading them in front of the company on the lawn, and conducting the chorale (as the schoolmistress called it) which they sang before they broke up. This was what the fine people had remained for, and all the parish would have been disappointed had they not stayed. But, notwithstanding, it was hard upon her, tired as she was, to have to stand and receive their compliments, and to be told that it had been "such a pretty scene."

"I enjoyed it very much," said Lady Westland, "I assure you; I only came to do a duty and countenance you, my dear Dolly; but I quite enjoyed it."

"We came to scoff, and we remained to play," said Ada; while Lord Westland squared his shoulders, and threw out his chest, and repeated his wife's observation about the pretty scene.

"And I hope you will always calculate on me to give my countenance whenever it is wanted," he said.

Dolly, though so tired, had to stand and smile, and

look gratified by all their compliments. And what was worse, when they had all at last been got away, there rose up from behind the chairs on which Mrs. Booth and Mrs. Rossiter, waiting with the ease of *habitués* till all was over, had seated themselves again after their leave-takings, a tall and gawky figure, dark in the fading light.

"Mr. Westland is going to stay, Dolly, to share our evening meal, though I have told him it will be a homely one," the rector said, not without a tone of apology in his voice. Another voice, high up in the air, muttered something about the greatest pleasure. But Dolly took no notice. This was the worst infliction of all. She let herself drop into the wicker-work chair with the cushions, which Lady Westland had declared to be so comfortable.

"I thought they were never going away," she said with angry candour. "I am so tired. I so wanted a little peace."

The rector and young Westland both knew the meaning of this speech, but neither ventured to reply.

Mrs. Booth, however, stretched out her hand and gave the girl a friendly pinch. "They are the most important people in the county, Dolly."

"No, indeed, that they are *not*," the girl cried loud out. She was not one to desert her friends, even though they might not be so good to her as she had hoped. But as Mrs. Booth's remark had been made in a whisper, no one knew exactly to what this prompt contradiction referred.

At supper Mr. Westland was of course placed at Dolly's right hand. If he was not the most important young man in the neighbourhood, he was nominally of the highest rank, and would no doubt have taken precedence anywhere of Paul Markham. He was very tall, and very lean, an overgrown, lanky boy, with big projecting eyes, which were full of meaning when he looked at Dolly—or at least of something which he

intended for meaning. He did not talk very much, but he gazed at her constantly, which was very irritating to Dolly. Mr. Rossiter was a much more lively person. He came in in a state of high good-humour, which none of the party already assembled shared. Both the ladies who were Dolly's guests had grievances. They had sat on uncomfortable chairs all the afternoon by way of showing their identity with the best families, but the Westlands and the Trevors had taken very little notice of them. The doctor's wife for one felt that she had not been of that service to Dolly which Dolly had a right to expect, and yet that she had not asserted her husband's position in anything like a satisfactory way by this failure in friendship. The supper-table was not as lively as a supper-table ought to be after a bright afternoon out of doors.

"I hope it all went off well," the doctor said as he looked round the languid party, and saw how little response there was in their faces to his cheery address and simple jokes.

"Oh, beautifully!" said young Westland, finding his voice with an effort; "like everything Miss Stainforth has to do with."

There was no murmur of response; and Dolly gave her champion a glance which drove him back trembling upon himself. Then Mrs. Booth said, stopping her knife and fork, "I think we missed Lady Markham." She said this as if it were a conclusion she had arrived at by a long process of reasoning; and then she returned to her cold chicken with renewed zest.

"That was it," cried Mrs. Rossiter, glad to hit upon something which relieved her own sense of guilt. "It was Lady Markham we wanted. She makes everything go smooth. She makes you feel that she takes an interest in you, and wants you to be comfortable."

"It is a pity," said the rector, "that such a pleasant type of character should so seldom be sincere."

"Papa," said Dolly, "I can bear a great deal—but if

any one says any harm of the Markhams I will not put up with it. If they had been here I should not have had everything to do myself. If they had been here those tiresome people would have gone away at the right time, and everything would have gone right. Sincere! Do you think it is sincere to say nasty things, and get out of temper when one is tired—like me?"

And poor Dolly nearly cried; till the doctor threatened her with a mixture to be taken three times a day; when she made a great effort, and shook off her evil disposition. Besides she had fired her shots right and left, wounding two bosoms at least, and there was an ease to the mind in that which could not be gainsaid.

"But I hear there are unpleasant stories afloat about the Markhams," the rector said at his end of the table. "I hope my old friend, Sir William, has not been remiss in his duties. A father should never give up his authority, even to his wife. I fear among them," he added, shaking his white head, "they have done everything they could to spoil Paul."

"So I hear," said Mrs. Booth, shaking hers. But nobody knew what was the real charge against the Markhams, or what it was that Paul had done. And after Dolly's profession of faith in them, which was something like an accusation against the others, these others might shake their wise heads, and communicate between themselves their adverse opinions. But before Dolly there was not another word to say.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE rectory of Markham Royal was a very good living—a living intended for the second son of the reigning family when there was a second son; and indeed it was more than probable that Roland Markham, when he grew up, would have to "go in for" the Church. in

order to take advantage of this family provision. Sir William, being in his own person the third son of his family, and the youngest, there was nobody who had a claim upon it when he came into possession of the title and estates; for the Markhams of Underwood, who were the next heirs, and who had been very confident in their hopes up to the moment of Sir William's marriage—a wrong which they had never forgiven—had but one son, who was too old to be cut into clerical trim. This was how Mr. Stainforth had got the living. He had held it for nearly thirty-five years, and had been a good rector enough, jogging on very easily, harming nobody, and if not particularly active in his parish, at least quite amiable and inoffensive, friendly with all the best families, and not uncharitable to the poor. He had a little money of his own, and had kept a good table, and returned to a certain degree the civilities of his richer neighbours. And he had been able to keep a pretty little carriage for his wife as long as she lived, and for his daughter; and altogether to maintain the traditional position which the rector of Markham Royal had always held in the county. Perhaps an inoffensive man who disturbs nobody is the one who can hold such a position best; just as it is better (though this rule has at present a brilliant exception) for a president of the Royal Academy to be not too distinguished a painter, and even sometimes for a bishop not to be too great a divine. Society prefers the suave and mediocre, and when a man acquires a high place in its ranks by reason of his profession, requires of him that he should be as little professional as possible. Mr. Stainforth was of the good old order of the squire-parson, the clerical country gentleman who respects abuses which are venerable, and deprecates any great eagerness about the way to heaven. Perhaps he had not very distinct views about heaven at all. Now and then he would preach a sermon about golden gates, and harps, and shining raiment, but it was seldom, if ever, of his own composition. In his

own practice he thought it best to think as little about dying as possible, and he did not try to impose a different rule on his neighbours. He thought that it would most likely all come right somehow or other in the end, and that in the meantime there was not much good to be done by too much dwelling on the subject, which indeed is a view of the subject which a great many people are disposed to take. He had lived long enough to see all his sons and daughters established in life, which was a great matter. He had two girls who were very well married, and two sons with capital appointments, besides Frank, who was scrambling for his living somehow, and could manage to "get on"—and Dolly, who was too young to cost very much. There was enough to provide for Dolly when the rector should die—and he felt that he had fully done his duty to his family. And he had done his duty to his parish. There was no more dissent than was inevitable; and Mr. Stainforth treated it as inevitable, and did not interfere with it. He was very reasonable on this subject—so reasonable that the curates he had generally disagreed with him violently; and he was at the present period taking the duty alone, though it was somewhat laborious, rather than attempt to regulate the young assistant priest who set up confessions, or the muscular young parson who instituted games.

"Let the people alone," was Mr. Stainforth's rule, to which these hot-headed young neophytes without experience would give no faith. Sometimes he would be quite eloquent on the subject. "Let the chapel alone," he would say. "What can we do in the Church with the emotions, especially among the poor? A washerwoman who has feelings wants her chapel. It makes her a great deal happier than you or I could do. All that does the Church good. And let the others peg away at me if they please. It keeps Spicer amused, and keeps him out of more mischief."

Spicer was the village grocer, against whom all the

young men hurled themselves and their arguments in vain. But the rector dealt with Spicer, and always had a chat with him when he passed the shop-door. There was a mutual respect between them.

"But our rector, I don't say nothing against him," Spicer would say at the end of his speech, when there was any demonstration in the neighbourhood in the dissenting interest; "he mayn't be much of a one for work, but he's a credit to the place." There was a great deal to be said for the head of the parish hierarchy who continued to get his things from you, blandly indifferent to the fact that you were a dissenter, and in despite of all those co-operative societies which drive grocers to a keener frenzy than any Church establishment. Lord Westland got all his things down from town, and so did the doctor and the smaller magnates; while even the chapel minister was known to have a clandestine hamper, given out to be a present from some supporter, but arriving suspiciously once a month. The rector, however, never swerved. To him the parish was the parish, and a Markham Royal grocer the proper grocer for Markham Royal—a principle which could not but have its reward.

This was the chief reason, and not economy, as many people said, why Mr. Stainforth did the duty himself, and had no curate. Dolly was his curate. She had been born in the order, so to speak, and none could recollect the time when she had not felt it her duty to set an example, and carried more or less the burden of the parish upon her shoulders. She had been dedicated, like young Samuel, from her earliest years to the service of the Temple. She set out upon her round of visits every day as regularly as any curate could have done, had her days for the schools, and her clothing clubs, and her mother's meetings, at which the seventeen-year-old creature discoursed the women about their duties to their families in a way which was beautiful to hear. How she could know so much about

children was a standing wonder to the women; but it was just as astounding to see her calculate the interest upon elevenpence ha'penny at four and a half per cent; indeed a great deal more miraculous to some of us. She played the organ in church; she took charge of the decorations. She watched all the sick people, careful to observe just the right moment when it was expedient "to send papa;" and the parish got on very pleasantly under the joint sway of the father and daughter. It did not make a very great appearance in the diocesan lists of subscriptions, and there was no doubt that a great many of the people who had feelings, as the rector said, went to the little Wesleyan chapel. But Mr. Stainforth did not mind that. It was a safety valve, and so was the Bethel chapel, in the nearest town, to which Spicer went every Sunday, which was much less tolerant than Bethesda, and hurled all manner of denunciations against the Church. Sometimes the neighbouring incumbents would warn the rector that his village was a hotbed of mischief, and be very severe on the subject of his excessive tolerance. But Mr. Stainforth was seventy-six, and not likely to live long enough to see any of the great earthquakes with which they threatened him. "There will be peace in my time," he said.

This supineness did not displease Sir William, who, though in opposition, held fast to the old Whig maxims of freedom of opinion, and preferred to conciliate the dissenters, with an eye to the general elections and their political support generally. He went very regularly to church at the head of his fine family, but there was always a consciousness in him that, much as he should regret it, it might possibly be his duty one day or other to assail the establishment; and he thought it a point of honour not to show any exaggerated attachment to it now which might be turned into reproaches afterwards. Neither did the Trevors object at all to Mr. Stainforth's easy good temper.

The things they were afraid of were the Pope, and the Jesuits, whom they supposed to be lurking under every hedgerow. So long as the rector kept ritualism at bay they found no fault with him. The Westlands, however, were very strong on the opposite side. They were people who endeavoured always to do as persons of their rank ought to do, and they liked a high ritual just as they liked high life. Though they "countenanced" the school-feast, and were always ready to do their duty in this way in the parish, yet they never let slip an opportunity of expressing their opinion of the rector's weakness.

"But we have no influence," Lady Westland said. "The living is in the hands of the Markhams. Though they are commoners they were settled here before us, and therefore have the advantage of us in a great many ways."

It was a bold thing to say this in the very district where it was well known the Markhams had been established for centuries, and where Lord Westland had acquired the Towers by purchase only about a dozen years before. But if there was one quality upon which Lady Westland prided herself it was courage. She was somewhat bitter about the Markhams altogether. There were so many things in which they had the advantage of her. To be sure, she took precedence of Lady Markham whenever they met, and walked triumphantly out of the room before her; but she could not but be aware that in most other ways the baronet's wife had the best of it. The Chase had been in the Markham family for generations, whereas Westland Towers was painfully new; and to come to still more intimate particulars, Paul Markham was a young man of distinction, whereas George Westland, though an honourable, was nothing but an overgrown school-boy. Ada, indeed, was quite as handsome, perhaps handsomer, than Alice, and much cleverer: but she did not receive the same attention. Ada was withal rather a

difficult young woman, who gave her parents a great deal of trouble. She took a pleasure in running her talk to the very edge of evil, and made every kind of daring revelation about herself and her family, putting her mother's secret intentions into large type and publishing them abroad. She liked to see the flutter of semi-horror, semi-incredulity with which her bold sayings were received. She liked to shock people; but perhaps, at the same time, she made a shrewd calculation that, when she published what seemed to be to her own disadvantage, nobody would believe her. This, however, was not so successful an expedient as appeared. When she said that Paul had been expected to throw his handkerchief at her, nobody took it for an impertinent volley of extravagance on her part. It was vain that she involved Dolly in it. In the very faces of her auditors Ada saw the truth reflected back to her; and thus, though she would not have hesitated to marry the heir of the Markhams, she could not excuse the family for what they brought upon her. Lord Westland was not a man to feel the stings which hurt his wife and daughter. He was protected by a much higher opinion of himself; but even he felt a certain annoyance with "my friend Markham," who was listened to more respectfully, and looked up to with much more trust than he. Lord Westland took this as an instance of the folly and stupidity of country people, but yet he felt it in his heart.

Thus the one family was to the other what Mordecai was to Haman. Lady Westland kept her ears always open to hear anything to the disadvantage of the Markhams. Paul's youthful vagaries, and even the little scrapes which Harry and Roland got into at school she seized upon with eagerness. She was as much interested in chronicling these misdeeds as if they had been so many items to her advantage; but, notwithstanding everything, the Markhams always came off the best. George Westland got into more scrapes at school than

all of them put together; and now that he had come home, and had finished his education, what must he do, this heir to a peerage, this only son of so rich and important a house, but go sighing and gaping after Dolly Stainforth, who was no more than the parson's daughter? His mother and sister were driven almost wild by the mere suspicion of this. And not only was it day by day more evidently true, but it even became apparent to them that George for once had reached a point from which he would neither be bullied nor frightened. He let them say whatever they pleased, but he took his own way.

What Dolly thought of this has been already seen. Dolly, who was angry at her brother's defection and sadly wounded by the failure of the Markhams, resented George Westland's presence more than she did the absence of the others, and turned her back upon him, rejecting his services. She treated him with absolute contumely, impatient of his very look. Why is it that the wrong person will always present himself in such cases? Why, when a girl's fancy is caught by one youth, will another attach himself to her side, and devote himself to her service, to have all the little carelessnesses of the other resented upon him? Dolly had not a word to say to young Westland. She would have liked to have pushed him aside out of her way; and Paul perhaps had not given one thought to Dolly since they danced together at the children's balls at the Chase, while he was still a schoolboy. Thus the threads in the shuttle of life mix themselves up and get all woven the wrong way.

The Trevors were happily beyond the reach of all tremors of this kind. The old admiral lived a kind of mummy life, swathed in flannels against the rheumatism, and in bandages against the gout, with his food weighed out to him, and his wine measured by the too-scrupulous care of his daughter, whose life was spent in guarding him against cold and indigestion and

excitement. Miss Trevor, the eldest, though she was deaf, always heard and understood what he said; but Miss Matilda, the second, never understood her dear papa, and had constantly to have his commands repeated to her. Between her parish work, in which she was assiduous, and her dear papa, this good soul's existence was full. She was very humble-minded, and anxious to please everybody, but yet she was constantly giving offence to Mrs. Booth, whom she sometimes passed in the road, and sometimes brushed against at the church door, without seeing. Thus her inoffensive life was diversified by a succession of little quarrels, wholly unintentional, and which the poor lady could not understand. But these were the only palpitations in her calm existence; and her sister was free even from such agitation. She gave herself up to the housekeeping, and to reading the newspapers, which she did every morning, from beginning to end, specially dwelling upon all the naval debates and letters about the construction of ships. To give the admiral his "nourishment" at the proper time, to see that the carriage came round exactly at the right moment, to regulate the length of the drive to a moment, this was "a woman's work," and absorbed the admiral's daughter in all the rigidity of routine. Thus life went on—as if it would never end.

As this history is for once to dwell in the highest circles, and deal only with people who may be called county people, and were of the highest importance in the district, it is scarcely necessary to speak of the smaller gentry. There were one or two small proprietors who farmed their own land, or who had so little land that it was scarcely worth farming, who lived about the skirts of the parish, and scarcely counted among its aristocracy. Some of these were so much nearer other parish churches that they did not even come to church at Markham Royal. Sir William Markham owned almost the whole of the parish. He had widened out

his borders year by year during the long time he had held the property, and swallowed up various decaying houses of old squires. Such a little villa as Rosebank could not make any claim to be considered among the very smallest proprietors, and it was more to her devotion to the church than to anything else that Mrs. Booth owed her social elevation. She was very good in the parish. She and her niece visited the poor assiduously, and were familiar every-day visitors at the rectory, and so insensibly saw themselves received everywhere. They were the agents of almost every scheme of social improvement, always ready to act for the greater ladies, who had less time to spare, and content to pick up the crumbs of society from these great folks' tables. Though they were quite insignificant in themselves they were in the midst of everything, and not unimportant members of the society which admitted them on sufferance, yet ended by being somewhat dependent upon them. If ever Miss Trevor enjoyed a holiday from her close attendance on her father, it was when Mrs. Booth had the carriage sent for her before luncheon and came to spend the day, with her dinner-dress and her cap in a little box. She could manage to guess at what the admiral meant, and she would play at backgammon with him, or read the newspapers, while Jane Trevor rested her weary soul in her own room, writing a detailed report to her aurist, or putting a few new verses into a book with a Bramah lock, which held the confidences of her life. It was Miss Booth who was the most popular of the two at Westland Towers, where Ada liked to have a hanger-on. But in the rectory they were both in their element—more familiar, and constantly interfering with Dolly, whom they both were very fond of, and whom they worried considerably. Rosebank had a balance and pendant in Elderbower, where lived an Indian officer and his family, but the Elders were a large family very much occupied with each other, with the cares of

education, and making both ends meet; and consequently they took little part in what was going on, and need not be counted at all.

This was the circle which encompassed the Markhams like a chorus, like the ring of spectators which is always found encircling combatants in all classes. In this arena, round which were ranged all the bystanders, was about to be enacted the drama of their family life.

CHAPTER XIX.

MR. AUGUSTUS MARKHAM GAVESTON strolled up the village when the children left him, looking curiously at all the cottages, till he came to the little whitewashed country inn, which called itself the Markham Arms. The little gentleman was full of interest in everything. He stopped and looked in at the windows of the little shop, where everything was sold, from biscuits to petticoats—gazed in with as much interest as if it had been a shop in Bond Street. He crossed over the street to see where the post-office was, and to look at the smithy, where the blacksmith and his journeyman and apprentice paused to push their caps from their foreheads and stare at him, as did also the groom from Westland Towers, very trim and fine, who had brought Mr. Westland's horse to have his shoes looked to. They all stared, and the stranger returned their gaze with smiling complacency, evidently thinking it quite natural that they should stare at him—a thing to be looked for. And the school children stared at him whom he met on their way to the rectory. Mr. Augustus did not mind. He looked at them all paternally, patting the heads of some of the little ones. The little girls curtsied to him—as you may be sure in schools superintended by Miss Stainforth they had been taught to do—and this pleased him greatly. He took off his hat to them,

which astonished the children as much as his white umbrella did, and the strangeness of his appearance altogether. The village was in a commotion, as was natural, by reason of the school-feast, and the arrival of so many carriages and visitors. Half at least of the houses were still pouring forth little bands in their best clothes, mothers and aunts standing at the door to watch the effect. So that it was a kind of triumphal progress which he made through the village street, where everybody was glad to have a new object to occupy them after the children had disappeared. The Markham Arms was not a much frequented inn; but it was as clean and neat as it was quiet and homely, and there was a pretty little parlour with a bow-window, all clustered with the common sweet clematis, the travellers' joy, and honeysuckle, into which Mrs. Boardman ushered the stranger with secret pride, yet many apologies.

"There is a bigger room up stairs, sir; but if so be as you could do with this till to-morrow——"

"It is the very thing I want," he said; and he bade her send some one to the station for his portmanteaus. "Only the portmanteaus. I don't want the big cases." This dazzled the landlady, and indeed there were found to be three large cases besides the portmanteaus, cases so large that it was all the little station could do to afford them shelter and safety. John Boardman fetched the other boxes himself, and was duly impressed by this evidence of wealth. The name on the luggage, as on the little gentleman's card, was Markham Gaveston; but whether by some freak of the uninstructed artist who had written the name in bold characters of print upon the cases, the Gaveston was small, and the Markham large, so that there was some doubt in the minds of the people, both at the station and the inn, which was the name to call the new-comer by; and what was still more odd, when they asked him, he only laughed and answered, "Which

you please," which confused them more and more. He informed John Boardman, however, that he was a relation of the family, but had been in foreign parts all his life, and had never seen Markham before; and, as he brought in the boys from the Chase to dine with him that very evening, there could be no doubt as to the justice of this claim. Also the landlord had a letter to put in the post for him that night which was addressed to Sir William Markham at Oxford. He must be a relation, but who was he? For the next two days the village was very much disturbed by this question. There were old people in the place who were proud to think that they knew Sir William's relations better than he himself did; but who this little gentleman was, and what might be the degree of his cousinship, they found it very hard to make out. He laughed once more when he was asked if he was "a full cousin," or a more distant relation.

"Something of that sort," he said, with a twinkle in his eye, as if this was a capital joke. He was so constantly about, and so ready to make acquaintance with everybody, that in two days the whole village knew him; and this question weighed upon the mind of the community. At last one of the old women in the almshouses who had spent half her life in the nursery at the Chase, by dint of almost superhuman cogitation, found a clue to the mystery. She remembered that one of the daughters of the late Mr. Markham of Underwood, who was "full cousin" to Sir William, had gone abroad after she became a widow, a very long time ago. Most likely she must have married again and become the mother of this little brown gentleman, who no doubt looked older than he was, being so spare and so brown. This was an explanation that satisfied everybody. The lady's name had been Willoughby when she left England, but what of that? It took a weight off the mind of the village to have the stranger thus made out and set in his right place.

And during the three days he spent in the village Mr. Markham Gaveston made acquaintance with everybody. His curiosity was insatiable. All day long he strolled about and questioned everybody. When he saw old Sophy coming from the woods with her bundle of sticks, he insisted on knowing where she got them, and how she got them, and all about her. Nothing escaped him. He found out that it was Lord Westland's groom that was at the smithy when he passed, and that the horse belonged to the Honourable Mr. Westland, and that the Honourable Mr. Westland was always finding errands to bring him to the rectory. This information he picked up by the way, as one to whom all news was pleasant; but the Markhams were the real objects of his inquiries. And when the landlady proceeded to intimate that Mr. Westland might save himself the trouble, since Miss Dolly cared more for Mr. Paul's little finger than for all his grandeur, and his title, the little gentleman at once owned the stronger spell.

"So there's a love-story going on, is there?" he cried briskly. "Mr. Paul! that's my young relation, I suppose? Are they going to marry? Come, tell me all about it. This interests me."

"Oh, *marry*, sir; bless you! No, it ain't gone so far as that," Mrs. Boardman cried. And she had to protest that there was nothing but "idle tales" in what she had said—her own silly fancies, as she added, with anxious humility, and bits of gossip among the servants. "You won't say as I said it, sir," she added. "I wouldn't be the one to make mischief for all the world, nor vex Miss Dolly, so good as she is; and most likely my lady wouldn't like it—and I don't say nothing for Mr. Paul neither. He is mostly away; it isn't what you could call keeping company. Oh, if us women hadn't got no tongues, what a deal o' mischief'd be spared!"

"That's what I'm always telling you," said John.

"And the men's worse," said his wife, going on. "Us women, we lets a thing slip, and never thinks;

but the bad stories, them as sets folks by the ears, they always comes from the men."

This amused Mr. Markham Gaveston greatly. He clapped his hands and encouraged them both to continue.

"At her, John!" he said, behind the good woman's back; but John shook his head and retired. He knew better.

And Mrs. Boardman wiped her hands on her apron, and went off "to see to my dinner." The dinner naturally was not hers, but her guest's, who was a small eater—much too small an eater; a single chop was all he had for lunch, a chicken served him two days for dinner. There was little credit in cooking for any one who was so easily satisfied. To be sure he had suggested one or two eccentric dishes to her when he came, which Mrs. Boardman had never heard of, and which she had declared could not be half so good for any one's "innards" as a plain joint; but since that the stranger had made no remarks, eating what was set before him without remonstrance, but too little of it to please his hostess. He was much more greedy of news than he was of his dinner; and this last piece of information cost him a great deal of thought.

Next day, the third day of his stay at Markham Royal, Dolly Stainforth had a little expedition to make by railway. Though she was far from being an emancipated young lady, and though her father was very careful that she should have in general all the guardianship that her position required, yet to be always accompanied by a servant on the little journeys which she made periodically to see an old aunt only two stations off was a burden Dolly could not consent to: for which reason it had become the habit at Markham Royal to appropriate a vacant carriage to the use of ladies—a carriage over which the guard was supposed to watch, defending it from all male intruders. In this compartment old George, the man-servant at the

rectory, carefully placed his young mistress; and all went on as usual till the very moment before the train started, when old George was gone, and the attention of the guard distracted; when the door of Dolly's carriage was suddenly, swiftly, noiselessly opened, and a little gentleman, in loose, light-coloured clothes, jumped in.

Dolly was so much startled that it was a minute before she found her breath, and in that minute the train had glided from the station.

"I fear I have frightened you," the stranger said.

Dolly was not at all frightened, but she was true to her father's precautions.

"Oh, no; but this is a carriage for ladies," she said.

"Dear me, what a pity!" cried the little man; but it was easy to see by his countenance that he did not think it a pity. "I am a stranger here," he said, "a stranger in England. I don't know all your ways. I will change at the next station if I am disagreeable to you."

"Oh, no," cried Dolly, horrified to be supposed guilty of rudeness. "It is not that. It is only that I am supposed always to travel by myself. Papa insists on a ladies' carriage. But it does not at all matter," she added, with a glance that was not flattering to the special intruder in question. "Nobody could mind——"

Dear, dear! Dolly thought to herself, this is ruder still; and blushed crimson.

The stranger, however, did not draw from this any conclusions which were humiliating to himself. People are not so close to mark our looks and words as we imagine them to be. He smiled serenely, and as the train was now plunging along in the fussy yet leisurely manner common to a country train which stops at all the stations, resumed, with an air of great satisfaction and complacency—

"I am very glad you don't mind; for I came into the carriage on purpose—because I saw you get in. I

wanted to speak to you," said Mr. Markham Gaveston with a genial smile.

Then Dolly began to quake a little. Was he mad—or what did he mean? "Do you know me?" she said, faltering. She had heard of the stranger at the Markham Arms, but had not seen him.

"I have the pleasure of knowing who you are," he said, taking off his hat with the utmost politeness. "My little—relations, the little Markhams, pointed you out to me."

"Oh," cried Dolly again, "then you are ——?"

"Yes, exactly," he said, smiling, "that is what I am. I have come from the tropics, and I do not know much about England. If I say anything that is very unusual, I hope you will excuse me. It is disagreeable that they should be away just when I have come so far to see them."

"Yes," said Dolly, hesitating. She could not refuse to answer him; but to discuss her friends with a stranger was a thing against which her heart revolted. "They did not expect to be away; it was quite unexpected," she said.

"And I have no reason to complain, for they did not know I was coming. All the same, one may say it is disagreeable, don't you think? I have to put up in the inn, instead of being in my—instead of being among my own people."

"Do you know the Markhams, sir?" said Dolly.

She had a way of saying "sir" to men whom she considered old men; but happily Mr. Markham Gaveston did not know what was his title to so respectful an address.

"I know the little boys and the little girls," he said. "I could wish there were no more."

"Why?"

Dolly turned upon him with a flash of indignation, with eyes wide open and lips apart.

"Ah! what a silly thing to say, wasn't it?" he said.

"You may be sure I couldn't have meant it. I want you to tell me about the others—the eldest girl and the boy."

"I! tell you—about the others!"

Dolly grew pale, and then red again. Either he must be mad, which had been her first thought, or else —

"Yes," he said, quite calmly, "don't be frightened. I want to have a good account of them, and that is what has brought me to you."

Once more Dolly stared at him in consternation. She wanted to be angry and think him impertinent, but he was not impertinent.

"Don't be frightened," her strange companion went on. "I want to hear all that is good of them. They tell me that I won't hear anything that is not good from you."

"Mr.—sir!—How can I talk," cried Dolly, with crimson cheeks, "of my friends to you? I—don't know you. Why do you want to question any one about them? Who told you I would say nothing that was not good? Does anybody think," cried Dolly, her eyes flaming, "that I would say either good or bad, for any one, that was not true?"

"I cannot answer so many questions at once," said the little gentleman; "besides, that is not what I want; I want to ask, not to answer. I want to know about my—relations. When I see them, perhaps they may not be very civil to me; they may think me a bore."

"Oh!" cried Dolly, "certainly they will be civil. Alice is too kind for anything else, and Paul—Paul is a gentleman," she said, raising her head. A softness came over the girl's eyes. She had no thought of betraying herself; perhaps indeed she was not aware that there was anything to betray; but in spite of herself, a certain subdued and dreamy glow, a kind of haze of golden light, came into her brown eyes at Paul's name.

"Well, that is something," said the stranger; "you don't think then that they will take to me much? but because the one is kind, and the other a gentleman——"

"That was not what I meant. Am I to pay you compliments to your face?" said Dolly, stopping short and looking suddenly up, half impatient, half amused.

"Certainly, if you wish to," he cried, promptly. "Oh, yes—do not be shy. I should not at all mind a compliment or two; indeed I think I should like them. Do not stand upon ceremony. If you can say seriously that you think me so nice that Alice will like me at once, and your Paul claim me as a brother——"

"He is not my Paul," cried Dolly, with another hot blush. "I do not like such a way of speaking. And, Mr.——"

She paused for his name, but the little man was malicious, and would not give it. He nodded his head two or three times.

"Just so," he said. "That is quite right," smiling with a mischievous smile.

"Mr.—Markham," Dolly said with a burst. "If that is not your right name, it is not my fault. How could Paul receive you as a brother? You must mean as—an uncle perhaps. Do you know that Paul is only just come of age, and Alice is but six months older than I?"

"Ah," said Mr. Markham Gaveston, stroking his moustache. "I did not think of that," and he looked at her with an expression half comic, half sad, slightly discomfited there could be no doubt. From this he shook himself free, however, and asked suddenly, "How old may Sir William be?"

"Sir William? Oh, quite old," said Dolly. She gave a furtive glance at him this time, anxious to keep on the safe side, and making a calculation in her own mind how old this little brown gentleman himself could be. Fifty, sixty? these two ages were much the same to Dolly. There was not to her any appreciable

difference in their extreme oldness and far-offness. Even forty was very old. Her mind wandered hazily, confused on these grey and misty heights. "He is not so old as papa," she said with hesitation, "for papa, you know, was his tutor at college; but he is a great deal older than Lady Markham. He did not marry till he was about—I don't quite know how much—about forty, I think I have heard people say," said Dolly, with a certain awe in her voice.

"And that seems quite old to you?"

"It is old to be married, is it not? And Lady Markham was so beautiful, everybody says. She is beautiful still. I don't know any one so lovely. I tell Alice often, though I love her dearly, she is not half, oh, not a quarter so pretty as her mamma."

"How does Alice like that? It will not please her much, I should think. I should not say that if I wanted her to like me."

The disdain with which Dolly erected her small head, and looked at him!

"That only shows," she said, "how little you know. Any girl would be a great deal more proud of her beautiful mamma than if she were ever so pretty herself. And Alice is very pretty. She has the sweetest eyes you ever saw. Quite blue like the sky—the deep sky. Not this little bit of no colour at all," she said, pointing upwards to the hazy grey-blue of heat: "but the deep, deep sky—the blue-blue behind the clouds. Everything about her is pretty; but she is not so handsome, so beautiful, as Lady Markham. Being beautiful, and being pretty, are two different things."

Her companion did not pay much attention to Dolly's reflections. He broke the thread of them quite abruptly by asking all at once—

"And Paul?"

"Paul!" Dolly raised her slight figure bolt upright as though she had been fifty. "You are very much

interested in Paul, Mr.—Markham ; but then you don't know them. I care for Alice most."

He answered by a laugh. What did he laugh at, this very strange disagreeable little gentleman ? Dolly had thoughts of turning her back upon him, of saying no more to him, of requesting him to change into another carriage at the station which they were approaching. But after all she did not want to be rid of him. She could not help liking to talk about the Markhams. What could be more natural ? Were they not her oldest friends ? her nearest neighbours ? the people to whom she owed most of her pleasures ? It was not doing any harm to them ; on the contrary, it might be doing them good. Dolly tried to remember, though her heart fluttered, whether she had ever heard of any rich uncle or benevolent relation who might intend to surprise them, to come home *incognito*, and find out their characters before he left them all his money. If this was so, might it not be for their very highest advantage that she should talk of them ? Mr. Markham Gaveston was the ideal of a rich uncle travelling *incognito*, such as appears now and then in novels. Perhaps he might intend to represent himself as a poor, not a rich, relation in order to try them. Dolly smiled within herself as this idea crossed her mind. Then indeed it was quite certain who his money would come to ! He would be received as if he were a prince. Lady Markham and Alice would not know how to do enough for him. They would try to make him forget his imaginary troubles ; they would comfort him for all his losses. If this was what he meant to do, Dolly smiled to think of the certain issue. Before she came to this smile, she had made a long circuit in her thoughts, and had half or wholly forgotten the laugh which had for a moment roused her indignation. And when he saw her smile, her companion took it as a sign of amnesty, and himself resumed the conversation.

"Come," he said, "you have told me about the

ladies; it is the turn of the others now; so if you please, let us return to the most important. I want to know about Paul."

"Is he the most important?" said Dolly, doing her best to move her pretty upper lip into a semblance of scorn; then she dropped from this height of proud disdain, and admitted in a cheerful tone, "I suppose he will be to gentlemen. I do not know Paul so well; that is natural. He has been away a great deal—not always at home like Alice; he was at school first, and now he has been nearly three years at Oxford. I have seen him only in the holidays. That makes a great difference," said Dolly, demurely. She looked at her questioner with quiet defiance. If he thought she was going to betray herself a second time! And Mr. Markham laughed too. They established a little tacit confidence on this point—not that Dolly would have owned to it for any inducement—but the stranger was quick, and understood.

"Shall you go and stay with them," she said, beginning to carry the war into the enemy's country. "when they come back?"

"If they will have me," he said.

"Oh, I am sure they will have you. If you take my advice, Mr.—Markham, this is what you must do. Pretend to be quite poor. Say you have lost everything, and that instead of coming to England rich as you had hoped, you have come with nothing. Oh, what fun it will be," cried Dolly. "I will back you up in everything you say. I will pretend you *told* me about it. Do this, Mr. Markham, and you shall see what will happen."

"What would happen in many houses would be that I should be turned to the door. But how do you know that I am not poor? then it would be no fun at all."

Dolly's laugh was a pleasure to hear; it was so honest, and simple, and sure. She had no doubt whatever on the question. Her theory explained everything

delightfully. She did not even take the trouble to reply to this suggestion. She said—

"We are coming to the Pemberton station. Do you mean to change here as you said?"

"I will go certainly, if you turn me out."

Here Dolly's laughing countenance suddenly clouded over. She cast at him a quick glance of entreaty.

"Oh, no, don't go, don't go," she cried. And then she added, in a tone of annoyance, "I think everybody is travelling to-day. Some people are always travelling. It is horrid," cried Dolly, "to see the same faces and hear the same voices wherever one goes."

The cause of this ebullition of temper was easily explained. It was George Westland, very deprecating and humble, who had opened the carriage door.

CHAPTER XX.

"GOOD morning, Miss Stainforth."

"Good morning," Dolly replied, with a forbidding face.

"Is there any room in your carriage? I am going only as far as Birtwood."

"There is always room in my carriage," said Dolly, "for it is a ladies' carriage. This gentleman got in in a hurry just as we were starting, but he is to leave if any ladies come and want his place. I could not let any other gentleman come in, but if Ada is with you——"

George Westland's countenance fell. It was a heavy and not a lovely face, but there was feeling in it, and a flicker of hope and pleasure had made his eyes bright. Now the light went out of it suddenly. He uttered a blank "Oh!" of disappointment, and stood looking at her with a vacant look. Her companion in the carriage

was not a likely person to excite any young lover's jealousy, but yet——

"No, Ada is not with me," he said, fixing an anxious look upon the stranger, who had retired to the other window, and was ostentatiously abstracting himself from the conversation. (She would surely never have anything to say to a bit of a little old fellow like that, poor George thought within himself.) He lingered at the window, not knowing what to say more, for conversation was not his forte. At last he remembered a subject which could not fail to be successful. "Have you heard," he said—"but of course you must have heard—that Sir William is ill? He has been to Oxford—something about Paul. What Paul has been doing, I don't know," the young man went on with increasing vigour, "but something to make his people uneasy. And Sir William is ill; some one said just now they were bringing him home to-day."

"Sir William ill! Oh, no, I have not heard anything about it. It must be a mistake," said Dolly, "for I am sure the children did not know, and they would be sure to hear."

"I am afraid it is quite true," said the young man. But with this he had to make an abrupt disappearance, as the train was about setting off again. When he had gone, Mr. Markham Gaveston drew near from the other end of the carriage.

"I did not want to interfere with your conversation," he said, with comical demureness. "He was not so bold as I; I did not ask leave. But indeed, poor young man, as I am already in possession, it would not have done him very much good."

Dolly did not think it necessary to take any notice, and the distance to Birtwood was very short and left little time for further talk. Her companion, on his side, did not take any notice of the news about Sir William, which Dolly hoped was not true. "The Westlands always know before any one else if there is anything the matter

with the Markhams; they seem to like to tell one," she complained, with a contradiction of her own hope. But though he had been so profuse in his inquiries before, the stranger said nothing more now. A certain sternness had crept into his brown face; the habitual smile, half mocking, half complacent, died away from his mouth, his upper lip set firmly upon the other. But Dolly, who was not very deeply interested in the Markhams' relation, did not notice these changes.

Birtwood was a railway junction, an important place in those regions. All the traffic of the district, all the comings and goings, had to concentrate there. Through all the county it was well known that you were more apt to see your friends at Birtwood than anywhere else. It did not matter where they were going, everybody passed by this point of union. People met as they crossed each other to take the trains up and down; there were all sorts of little services which one could render to another; and it was said that many marriages had been made and friendships cemented during the intervals of waiting which were inevitable, in the tedium of that new ill which modern flesh is heir to—the necessity of waiting for your train. The train in which Dolly and Mr. Markham Gaveston were was a little local train, and therefore used with indignity. It was pushed about, now to one side, now to the other, before it was permitted to approach the platform, another more important line of carriages being brought up and allowed to disgorge its passengers before the very eyes of the humble travellers who were kept behind, making little runs up and down, though they had arrived before the train which was thus preferred to them. Dolly, though she was used to this, felt it incumbent upon her to put on a show of indignation, for she did not want a stranger to suppose that this was how the trains from Markham Royal were always used. "I will make papa write about it," she said. She was standing in front of the window when at last the train

drew up, obscuring the scene for the little man behind, who took it patiently enough. When, however, Dolly uttered a little cry, and, leaning out head and shoulders, made eager signs to some one already standing on the platform, exclaiming, "Oh, Alice! Alice! wait a moment," his interest was instantly roused. As soon as the carriage stopped, the girl precipitated herself out of it, and rushed towards two ladies who were waiting. Mr. Markham Gaveston made no attempt to follow. He placed himself at the window of the carriage and looked out, his brown face wholly changed in aspect, his eyebrows contracted, his lips set firm. Two women, mother and daughter, one in full maturity, the other in the sweetest bloom of youth, with their face turned towards a third person, who came slowly along leaning upon the arm of a young man. Dolly, rushing towards them, was received by the other girl with a hurried gesture of her hand, half salutation, half intended to draw the new-comer out of the way; while the elder lady took no notice, her face, which was full of anxiety, being turned towards the advancing group. All the people about followed more or less that anxious look, and the officials of the place were crowding round in respectful attendance. The spectator at the window, who had grown very pale through his brownness, saw an old man walking slowly and feebly along, leaning heavily upon his companion's arm. He seemed to say something as they made their way along, for the young man turned round and waved his disengaged hand to warn the bystanders away. The blood rushed into Gus Markham's ears, tingling and throbbing, as he saw this little procession pass, so close to where he sat at his window that he could have touched the chief figure. Sir William was ashy pale, his under lip drooped, one of his hands hung with a look of useless limpness by his side, he shuffled slightly with one foot. The air of a man stricken and broken down as by some great blow was upon him. The spectator gazed with the strangest

pang, eagerly, keenly at the face he had never consciously seen before. Not a doubt of who it was crossed his mind. He had expected to meet him coldly, perhaps to be received with doubt and antagonism; but it had never occurred to Gus's somewhat superficial but not unamiable spirit that anything tragical would be involved in the encounter. Gradually indeed, a sense of issues more serious than any that had ever occurred to him before had been invading the kindly self-satisfaction of his nature. Now he sat and gazed as under a spell. They had shown him Sir William's portrait at the Chase. Was it he that had made the difference between that self-possessed, dignified, imposing little statesman and this broken and suffering old man? Gus gazed as one who cannot detach his eyes. The whole scene passed before him like a picture. The beautiful, anxious woman, gazing with such circles of trouble round her eyes, watching every step her husband made; the beautiful girl, putting her young companion aside, watching her father creep along through the sunshine; the young man—but here Gus's thoughts broke off short. Was that Paul? It did not seem to him like the idea of Paul which he had got from all that had been said. The young man was not like any of the others. He had none of that "family look" which distinguishes even in unlikeness members of the same race. His face was serious, but not anxious like the others; he had an air of kind solicitude, not of family trouble. Was it Paul? Was it Sir William's heir? They passed slowly before him, all the rest of the faces round looking after them, turned towards them, making them the centre, as this far more deeply interested spectator did.

He felt himself drawn after them, he could not tell how, and stole quite quietly out of the carriage as soon as they had passed. They were going further on to another train—a special one—which was going back to Markham Royal. Gus followed slowly among the other

bystanders, walking as near the principal persons as he could, following as at a funeral. Was it his doing? Was it his fault? He heard the murmurs of the people with a strange sense of guiltiness. "He's aged ten years," he heard one say to another, "since the other day." "Ah, sons has a deal to answer for," said another. This speech went buzzing through his mind like a winged and stinging insect. It hurt him, though nobody could have thought of him in saying it. He saw the sick man put carefully into the carriage, watching every movement, and feeling as if he himself were hurt by the little stumble of his foot as he went in—the jar of unexpected motion in the train. Lady Markham passed him slowly, as he stood looking with a woful face, deadly serious and awe-stricken, after the sufferer, and gave him a grateful glance, seeing what she thought the sympathy in his eyes. But it was not sympathy; it was a far stronger, more personal feeling. He stood gazing while everything was arranged for Sir William's comfort, and started to hear his voice coming out of the midst of the anxious group. It was not much he said—nothing, indeed, but a "That will do—that will do!" half querulous, half grateful. But the sound gave the looker-on a shock; it sounded to him reproachful, almost terrible. He kept standing there, staring, seeing nothing except the man whom he had never seen before—whom, for all he knew—was it possible?—his letter had killed.

Then suddenly the sound of other voices came to his ears—a whispering conversation. The two girls were behind him, not conscious of his presence.

"Very ill," one was saying. "Oh, Dolly, yesterday we thought he would have died. But he is so much better now. The doctor was quite perplexed; he said he never saw anything so momentary; he could not call it a fit—it lasted so short a time. He thinks in a day or two he will be quite well again."

"Alice!" said the other's whispering voice, "don't

tell me if it vexes you ; but I will never—never say a word. Oh, tell me ! I can't think of anything else—was it Paul ? ”

“ Paul ! ” with a tone of indignation. Then the voice softened. “ Dolly, dear, I know why you ask. Paul has been—very—wilful : he has given us a great deal of grief. I don't know how to tell you. But it was not Paul. Oh, there have been so many things ! and he had letters—that worried him.”

“ Was that all ? ”

She was standing close by the man into whose heart these words sank like a stone.

“ Everybody,” said Dolly, “ is worried by letters ; and now that he is safely here, you and your mamma will be able to take care of him, and keep everything that is bad for him out of his way.”

“ I hope so,” said Alice doubtfully. And then she passed Gus Markham so closely that her dress touched him. He withdrew from the touch hastily, and looked at her with anxious eyes. If she had known ! but she did not look at him ; far less had she any thought that he was involved in the catastrophe that had happened. He stood quite still, paying no attention to Dolly, watching them as Alice joined her mother in the carriage. Then he hurried on to another compartment and got in. What a home-coming it would be !—the children that had been so merry subdued and silenced at once—the big house that had looked so peaceful, filled full of apprehension and trouble. He got into one of the carriages that followed, with a sense that nothing could disassociate him henceforward from this troubled family.

Dolly, standing wistful on the platform to watch her friend go away, caught sight of him, too, as the train passed, and a gleam of wonder shot over her little pale face. Yes, they would all wonder, no doubt. It would seem strange—very strange to everybody. But it was clear that wherever this party went he must follow them. His lot was cast in with theirs, once for all.

CHAPTER XXI.

ON the morning when Lady Markham went upon that unfortunate visit to Spears in his shop, which has been already recorded, both her husband and daughter were early astir—astir in that way which so often occurs in a family disturbed by domestic anxiety, when all are roused and in movement before the ordinary time, yet all unwilling to begin the day, to meet, to breakfast, to return once more to painful discussions of a trouble which no discussions ever diminish. Lady Markham stole out, thinking that both were asleep, while, on the other hand, both father and daughter respected her restlessness, and used what expedients were in their power to soothe their own.

Sir William had his writing-case, and the despatch-box which he carried everywhere with him, taken downstairs, to the big, bare sitting-room, in which his wife and he had discussed Paul on the previous night—a high square room, like a box, as blank and featureless; and there sat down, and made a pretence of writing his letters,—nay, more than a pretence, for his mind was preternaturally clear, stirred into activity and wakefulness more strenuous even than its wont, by the care which was the undercurrent of all his thoughts, and perpetually present with him. He wrote several letters about business, public and private, in which his well-known terse and concentrated style was more concentrated and terse than ever. And by times he laid down his pen, and breathed a sigh out of the very depths of his chest, from the bottom of his heart. This was all the sign he gave of the distractions which were in his mind. It was much from him. He was not so overwhelmed as his wife by the suggestion of Paul's possible entanglement, but he was much more angry, annoyed,

and impatient of the folly which all his wisdom could not cure. What can be more irritating, confusing, bewildering to a man who knows himself a power and influence in the world : not to be able to influence the being nearest to him to persuade his own son to hear reason ! There could not be a greater irony of fate. And behind this irritation and annoyance there was the other mystery, which only he knew of—the danger which menaced Paul in those prospects which Paul held so lightly, and was ready to throw away on the lightest inducement. Would he care as little for them if they were to disappear from him at the will of another, not his own ? To find himself thus, between two impossibilities—between his young son whom he could no more move than he could move a mountain, and another unknown being who for aught he knew might be as little manageable as Paul, he was held fast and his mind driven to bay. He kept himself out of the whirl of thought and feeling which these perplexities raised by mere force of will, and sat perfectly self-controlled at the bare table writing his letters, himself as neat as usual, every fold of his trim attire in its right place, his tie tied with all the usual exactitude, his sentences more sharply cut, more tersely defined than ever. The suppressed excitement in him acted as a powerful stimulant, quickening his heart's action, and intensifying the clearness of his brain ; but now and then he put down his pen, forgot the imperial problems which were easier to solve than these private ones, and relieved his full heart with the labouring of a profound sigh ; then set to work once more.

The breakfast was brought in before Lady Markham appeared. Alice had been up in her own room for, she thought, hours—trying to read, trying to find any little trivial occupation, wandering to the window to gaze out blindly, seeing nothing, fulfilling all the tricks of anxiety, as if she, happy child, had been born to it, or had lived in no other atmosphere all her days. And yet it was

But a short time since the very *a, b, c*, of this devouring absorbing passion, had been unknown to her—so easily are all its habits learnt. She went down stairs when the hour for breakfast arrived, and found Sir William very busy over his papers.

"Where is your mother?" he said.

Alice did not know; but they easily concluded that being ready early she had gone—it was not far—to see her boy in his rooms, perhaps to use some argument with him which had been taught to her in the counsels of the night.

"She will have gone to bring Paul to breakfast," Alice said, feeling it was her business to smile, and keep what show of liveliness was possible. Then she made the tea, and going to the window once more stood looking out, hearing in the silence the scratch of her father's pen upon the paper, and the bubbling and boiling of the urn upon the table.

By and by they sat down to breakfast. Lady Markham possibly was staying with Paul. Perhaps he was late, as usual, and kept her waiting. It seemed a cheerful token, a sign of good, to fall back upon Paul's lateness—that familiar home grievance which they all had laughed and scolded about a hundred times. To say that he was "late as usual," that mamma no doubt had found him in bed, and was waiting for him, lazy fellow, seemed to break the new and gloomy spell.

Just then, however, a step approached, and some one knocked; a servant, and after him, their friend of yesterday, young Fairfax, very shamefaced and blushing, who came to say that Lady Markham had sent him, that she was taking off her hat up stairs, and would be down directly; and that he was under her orders to wait here for something she wanted him to do.

Fairfax blushed to the roots of his hair, and was full of apologies.

"I am so sorry," he said, "to disturb you; but Lady Markham——"

"Bring another cup," said Sir William.

The waiter, who had ushered in Fairfax, had brought also a letter, which was almost more surprising than the other visitor.

Sir William, however, was glad of any one who took him out of himself. He looked at his letter, but it did not seem important. The postmark was Markham Royal. There was no one there to give him uneasiness of any kind. He took it up between his finger and thumb, as he said—"Bring another cup."

And then neither of the young people knew anything more about Sir William till Lady Markham came in. He retired behind his letter as behind a shield, and the others talked. Fairfax was somewhat shy. He described how he had met Lady Markham in the fresh morning.

"It is the most pleasant time for walking if people only knew."

"Did mamma go to see Paul? and oh, where is he? will not he come?" said Alice.

The tears got into her voice. Had things gone so far that he would refuse to come?

"I don't think she has seen Markham," said young Fairfax.

Lady Markham had brought him in with her that she might not be obliged all at once to explain where she had been. The same reason made her spend a longer time than was necessary in taking off her hat and putting on the matronly cap with which she covered her beautiful hair. She thought with the simple subtlety of an innocent woman that the conversation would be in full course when she made her appearance and any confusion on her own part be concealed. When she came in her manners were of the conciliatory and effusive kind which is common to all culprits desirous of avoiding explanations of equivocal conduct.

"I met Mr. Fairfax when I went out, and I met him again coming back," she said, "and he owned he had

not breakfasted. I hope you are giving him something to eat, Alice."

Alice looked up anxiously in her mother's eyes. Where was Paul? that look inquired, but the glance with which Lady Markham replied conveyed no information. She shrank from her child's look, and sitting down began to talk almost volubly.

"I went further than I meant to go; the morning was so lovely and everything so still. Is it usually so still, so vacant, in summer, Mr. Fairfax? In the country we are used to it—but to see a place usually so full of young life in this state of quiet is strange. I met—scarcely any one," said Lady Markham. "William, you will have some more tea?"

Sir William did not make any answer. The letter which he had been holding up dropped, or rather the hand which had held it dropped upon his knee; and he was leaning back in his chair, Lady Markham could see with the corner of her eye—but she did not look at him, not wishing to risk the encounter.

"I thought I should be back before you were ready," she said. "We are all early this morning. I suppose it is because an inn is so unlike home. William—Oh!" She rose to her feet in sudden alarm. "Are you ill? What is the matter?"

He was leaning back in his chair, his head drooping against it, his face very pale, his mouth open and his breath labouring and painful, but he had not lost command of himself. When his wife rushed to him he tried to smile.

"Feeling—faint," he said, feebly.

It was a weakness to which he had been subject before. While they hurried to get wine, eau-de-Cologne, all the usual restoratives, he, still keeping up a vestige of a smile, did his best to fold up the letter he was holding, and groped about for the envelope.

"I will put it away," his wife said; but he made a slight negative movement of his head and succeeded in

pushing it into a letter-case, which he always carried. The envelope had dropped on the floor. Who thought anything of it? He had things to move him quite sufficient to account for any disturbance of the heart without seeking for further causes. After a while the faintness passed off, his breathing improved, his heart began to beat naturally, and he came, or seemed to come, to himself. When he went up stairs with Lady Markham's anxious attendance, Alice and the young man remained alone. These few minutes had done as much as weeks generally do towards the growing acquaintance of these two young persons. Fairfax had run hither and thither to get whatever they wanted. He had supported Sir William up stairs. He had shared in the alarm, the confusion, the trouble of the moment. Alice came down with him after her father had been established in his room, to think of the civilities which were due to a stranger. The half-eaten meal on the table, the confusion of chairs, the air of human trouble and agitation in the place had already made the bare room more like an inhabited house. Alice faintly begged her companion to take his place again.

"Mamma will come presently. He will want nothing but quiet and rest: he has been—worried—you know."

"Yes," said Fairfax; "it throws a light upon some things I never thought of before. My people are robust, fortunately; they are only uncles and aunts, who don't suffer in the same way as one's parents, I suppose. But, Miss Markham, if any one had cared as much for me—I have given a great deal more cause for anxiety than your brother has done. When I see how you are all upset it makes me blush for myself."

"Oh, Mr. Fairfax, it is so kind, so good of you to say so."

"Is it?" he said, with genuine surprise; "now I wonder why? There is no goodness about it, I fear,

one way or the other. Only there are lots of us that don't realise—that can't understand."

Alice's heart grew quite light. She considered that this independent testimony was as good as a vindication of Paul. A young man, a comrade, must know all about him, that was self-evident; and when he declared so distinctly Paul's superiority to himself what doubt could there be that such an uncalled, generous witness must be trustworthy? She could have laughed, or cried for pleasure.

"I should like mamma to hear you," she said. "I suppose it is because he is so much to us all that we are so foolish. You don't think he will really go away? That is what worries papa. He wants him to go into parliament, and public life."

Fairfax laughed.

"He is a lucky fellow. It is not possible to imagine that he could willingly throw away all these chances; but if I can answer for Markham's heart I can't answer for his head, Miss Markham. The one is as right as a compass, but the other is packed full of crotchets I must allow; and what he may be able to do in that way, how far he may go, I would not undertake to say."

Alice's countenance fell, then brightened faintly again with a little light of opposition.

"You may call them crotchets, Mr. Fairfax, but I am sure Paul's ideas are convictions, and what can he do but follow them out?"

"Ah, that is giving up the question," said the other. "I believe they are convictions; but you may be convinced of a foolish thing as well as a wise one."

"What he says is not foolish. I do not agree with it," said Alice, "but it is fine, it is noble; he would do what our Lord says, give up everything for the poor."

Fairfax shook his head.

"It sounds very fine in that way, Miss Markham; but that is not how Paul puts it. It is not giving to the poor, but sharing with his equals that is his thought, and

I do not think you would like that. If they all had their share to-morrow, half would have two shares next day—at least so everybody says,” he went on with a laugh —“all the philosophers; and I am sure Paul would have no share at all. He would have given it away to somebody who persuaded him that he had not drawn a good lot. ‘Take it,’ he would say, ‘I can starve better than you can,’ for he is a fine aristocrat, our friend Paul.”

“Do you call that being an aristocrat?”

“To be sure; isn’t it? A poor little *roturier* like myself has not the knack of it. I should say, ‘Take a cut at mine,’ as if it was an orange, and hack at it myself among the rest. But Markham does things with a grand air. He will always have it; indeed, I think that when he had got his share to which he would allow he had an indisputable right, he would prefer to give it away in a lordly manner, and keep nothing but his magnanimity. That is what he is doing now.”

To have such an audience as Alice, with that glow of tender gratitude and pleasure in her eyes, looking up to him, fixed upon his face, her smile following every word of this pretended impartial and philosophical description, was worth any man’s while. He was tempted to go on romancing about Paul, giving him not only the praise he felt his due, but a great deal more, in order to secure a little longer that rapt attention. But perhaps it was better to stop, and leave her time enough to say with her hands clasped, and her whole soul in her look—

“Mr. Fairfax, you make me very happy. They have whispered things to mamma which have made her wretched; but it is ‘nothing but his magnanimity:’ that was what you said?”

Lady Markham opened the door, and came into the room before Fairfax could reply. She was preoccupied, and took no notice of the conversation that was going on.

“Your father has fallen asleep,” she said; “he is very much exhausted. Oh, how I wish we had not left home.” Then she perceived Fairfax, and added with a change of

tone, "You have had no breakfast. Alice, I thought you would attend to Mr. Fairfax."

"Oh!" cried Alice, "do you think he cares about breakfast when we are in such trouble? He has been telling me about Paul. Mamma, listen to him. He must know. He says it is all Paul's magnanimity—that was the word."

"Oh, my dear, my dear," cried Lady Markham, "it is my fault. I have made everything worse. Oh! why will women interfere? We ought to have stayed at home, and had patience. What can we do one way or another? I have behaved like a fool and got my boy into more trouble. And now your father. What shall we do if he is ill too?"

"Mamma, it is impossible that you can be to blame."

"Quite impossible!" cried Fairfax. What gave him any right to speak? Yet they took it as a matter of course. "And pardon me, Lady Markham, I do not think there is any one much to blame. There is no harm in it at all. If you could but see behind the scenes as I do! Spears is an enthusiast—say a fanatic; he believes all he says, and Paul believes him and thinks he thinks with him; but he does not altogether; and they will differ more and more as time goes on. Patience, and it will come right."

"Ah, if I could have had patience! Do you know what anxiety means?" said Lady Markham. "It is a determination not to be unhappy. What does it matter whether I am happy or not—I have been very happy all my life. I ought to bear it, and wait till God sends a cure; but we would not, Alice—we would rush into it, knowing nothing, meddling. Oh, why should women interfere!"

This strained Alice's sense of natural justice.

"Have not women as much to do with it as men?" she said.

Lady Markham shook her head.

"I have made things worse—I have made everything

worse. Mr. Fairfax, will you go and tell Paul that his father is ill? Oh no, I have no right to ask you to take so much trouble; but you are kind, I know. You have a mother who would go out of her senses too, if anything was amiss. When you tell her she will explain it all to you; how foolish, how foolish a woman can be. Go and tell him that his father is ill. His father is not a man to be ill for nothing. He will see it is no light matter when he knows that his father is ill. There is something—a little—the matter with Sir William's heart—not much, thank God; but we ought to spare him. Will you tell Paul?—but Alice, Alice, how could you be so careless, Mr. Fairfax has had no breakfast!"

Lady Markham rose hastily, and drew a chair to the table, and turned to him, pointing to it, with a tremulous smile about her mouth, though the tears were standing in her eyes.

Was it possible that it was only yesterday he had come to know them? He hurried out with his message, quite agitated by the sight of this family trouble. It was no affair of his, and he had no mother as Lady Markham suggested, to make him understand; but his heart seemed to be suddenly filled up like an empty vessel with these new people's affairs. He tried to laugh at himself, but stopped in the midst of the effort, growing portentously grave. Why should he laugh? If Sir William was ill, and Paul on the point of abandoning his natural position and his native country on a wild-goose chase, with which in all probability he would soon be utterly disgusted, circumstances were very grave for the Markham family. Perhaps Fairfax felt it all the more strongly that he in his own person had no family to abandon. He felt the want so much that he wondered all the more at one who, with all these pleasant things belonging to him, should be willing to throw up everything, and go off into the wilds with Spears—with Spears! he repeated to himself with indignant, yet half-amused surprise. He did not know anything about

Janet, for the very good reason that till this morning there had been nothing to know.

Fairfax walked very rapidly to Paul's college, but did not find him. As he however came slowly back again across the deserted quadrangle, he met young Markham coming gloomily along, his head down, and his countenance obscured. There was a sort of dull decision in Paul's aspect, as if all his affairs had been settled at a stroke, as if the hopes and uncertainties of ordinary life were over for him. He who held his head so high, whose step was so light and elastic with all the rapidity of a visionary, came along now crushing the grass with a heavy foot, all the lightness and youthfulness gone out of him. Fairfax looked at him with an impulse of wonder. This favourite of fortune, so much beloved, important to so many, with the world at his feet, what could have put so much perverseness into his mind that he, of all men in the world, should be discontented with his lot! How wonderful it was! Paul did not want to be accosted, to be disturbed in his gloomy thoughts by any frivolous interruption. He was about to pass with a sullen nod when Fairfax stopped him against his will.

"Markham, I am sent to tell you that your father is ill."

Paul stopped, and regarded him with sudden anger.

"What the devil," he said, with altogether uncalled-for indignation, "have you to do with my affairs?"

"Nothing in the world; but your father has been taken ill at the hotel," said Fairfax. His cheek flushed, too, but he subdued himself. "Lady Markham sent me to tell you. I have nothing to do with it," he said; then went on, while the other stood and glared at him. Fairfax felt the blood boiling in his veins; but to quarrel with the undutiful son was not in his *consigne*. A man with three such people hanging (it seemed) their happiness on his wayward conclusions: his father ill, his mother with those beautiful eyes all strained with anxiety; his sister—Fairfax's eyes grew dim, as with a

dazzlement of light, as he seemed to see before him Alice, with her head raised, her hands clasped, her blue eyes full of emotion—all for Paul. Good heavens! who dared speak of equality? This fellow, who was ready to share everything with his neighbours—how insensible he was to all those happinesses which he could not share.

CHAPTER XXII.

PAUL did not at first obey the call thus sent to him. He lingered, angry that his friend should interfere as he said. He knew it was not interference, but the pride which was so strong in him, notwithstanding all his theories, resented haughtily the intrusion of a stranger into his family. Paul's theory was far from being complete. He was ready himself to abandon all he possessed, and to assert it as a necessity that every honest man should do the like, receive his share and nothing more; but he did not contemplate the idea of a general descent of his family into the wider ranks of common brotherhood. That his father should share his ideas, and resign his wealth and position, was a thing incredible he well knew; and curiously enough he had never thought of it. Whatever happened in the way of levelling, it had never seriously occurred to him to think that the Markhams would be as the Spears, as the grocers or the hatters. (Grocers and hatters by the way are always excluded in visionary schemes of revolution. One must draw a line somewhere; and both the rich and poor draw it at the shopkeeper.) Such a thing could not be; it was impossible. Were there a republic proclaimed in England to-morrow, was there a general confiscation and redistribution of everything, making all men the same, the Markhams could not be as the Spears. It was not possible.

But still more hotly, as in the presence of real danger, Paul's pride stood up against the possibility of the Markhams being as the Fairfaxes.

Richard Fairfax was his friend ; he was a gentleman—yes, no doubt, in himself a gentleman—but not as the Markhams were gentlemen. He was a nobody ; he was the son of a nobody. He did not belong to the Fairfaxes of the north or of the south. He had a good name, but no more. What had such a fellow to do in Alice Markham's company ? Spears at the Chase was an eccentricity of his own, which made Paul feel himself above prejudice, and nobly superior to the conventional maxims of society ; but Fairfax there affronted his pride. The two things were quite different. The same rules did not seem to apply to the noble working man, who was above them, as to the gentleman who was only a gentleman in his own right. That his mother should have formed a kind of alliance with this young man (though his own friend) irritated him beyond measure. Women were so easily taken in. Good manners, and a look of good breeding—so easily acquired nowadays when everybody is formed in the same mould, and all kinds of people can achieve the hall-mark of public schools and universities,—was enough to take in a woman. Had Paul been consulted, no such person should have entered the sacred precincts.

Yet Paul was a democrat, on the verge of surrendering everything, and throwing in his fortunes with a little communistic party ! The inconsistency did not strike him, or if it ever stole across his mind, he repelled the consciousness with a hot protestation within himself that it was not at all the same thing. That Spears should be his equal was a thing to fight for, a thing that could never derange the inborn sense of aristocracy ; but that Fairfax, who was so near his equal, should be his equal—therein lies the danger, which instinct seizes upon, which rouses pride in arms.

This proud distaste and discontent occupied his mind

at first to the exclusion of every other feeling. And when that faded, it may be allowed that Paul had some cause for a disinclination to see his mother. What had she done? She had dragged down upon his head the humble roof under which he had intended to find shelter. She had thrown him into the arms of those with whom indeed he was eager to consort, but whose embrace was no way attractive—nay, was repulsive to him. She had changed all his circumstances, vulgarised his plans, degraded him from the rank of a political apostle into that of a wretched besotted lover. Young men who are not in love, and in whom the intellect predominates, are apt to be very hard upon what they consider the delusion, the incredible folly of such a passion. To sacrifice freedom, personal independence, the unencumbered lightness of manhood, for the sake of a woman, seems to them the most ridiculous of mockeries until the moment comes when they share it. This was Paul's way of thinking. It was an outrage to his nature and mental powers to make him appear to be doing that for Janet Spears which he was doing from the highest principle. And this was what his mother, with her womanish interpretation of his high aims and wishes, had made appear. He could not forgive her; and in this he was not without reason. He made many efforts before he could think with patience of the strange morning's work which had changed everything for him. No, he could not go to her so soon. He went to his rooms and shut himself in, sitting down among his books like any Roman among any ruins. Read! why should he read? These were useless tools of an old world, which he was about throwing off. "Honours!" what were they to him? The schools and the struggle had retreated into dim distance. A degree would be of far less consequence to him than a gun, and all his studies not worth half so much as the simplest lesson of his country breeding. To sit there, however, among all those relics of a time which was over, which had no

more hold upon him, was gloomy work. And every refuge seemed taken from him. He did not want to go to the rooms of any other "man" where he might meet Fairfax. He could not go back to Spears; his heart revolted at the thought of going (as habit made him call the place where his parents were) home. He was walking about in this gloomy way, now gazing out of one window, now out of another, when a little tap came to his door, a light foot, a soft voice, and agitated face.

"Oh, Paul, may I come in?" Alice said. "Have you not seen Mr. Fairfax? He was to tell you papa was ill. We want you—oh, we want you, Paul."

"What has Fairfax got to do with it?" growled Paul.

"Mr. Fairfax! Oh, nothing, but that he was so kind; he helped papa up stairs. He came for you when mamma sent him. I do not know what we should have done without him; for—you were not there, Paul!"

"Not much wonder if I was not there!"

"Why? Mamma does nothing but blame herself. She cries and says we should not have come. Oh, Paul! and papa, I told you, has had one of his faints. Will you come?" cried Alice, moved to tears, yet flushing high with a generous impatience; "or are we to be left to shift for ourselves?"

"She deserves it," he said. "What had she to do with it? Surely I am old enough to manage my own affairs."

"Is it *mamma* you mean by she? Then stay—or go where you like. Oh, how dare you!" cried Alice, wildly angry. "*Mamma!*" This stung her so that she went to the door hurriedly, going away; but that little flash of wrath was soon over. She stopped and turned round upon him, making another appeal. "You don't deserve that we should care for you; but we do care for you," she said. "Oh, Paul! when I tell you papa has had one of his faints—for what? because to think of you

going away, forsaking us, giving up home, and your own place, and the people that you ought to care for, was more than he could bear. Paul! how can you leave us—leave Markham and everything you were once fond of—leave your duty, and the place you were born to?”

“My dear little Alice,” he said, with a smile, glad to conceal a little melting of his own heart which was beyond his power of resisting, by this fine superiority, speak of things you understand.”

Then Alice flashed upon him with all the visionary vehemence of a girl in her own defence.

“How should I not understand?” she cried, “Am I so stupid? It is you who make yourself little, pretending to despise us girls. What is there to despise in us? We do not fill our head with pride and fancies like you. We love those who belong to us, and serve them, and do our duty as we know how. It is not we who leave our old father to suffer, or tear our mother’s heart in two. It is not we that turn peace into trouble. There you stand,” cried Alice, “a man! fit to be in parliament making the laws better—fit to be doing something for them that belong to you, after learning, learning all your life, doing nothing but learn, that you might be good for something. And now, all you think you are good for is to emigrate, like the poor Irish. Is that all you are good for? Then you ought to be humble, and not dare to turn round and sneer and tell us to speak of things we understand. Understand! I understand that if you can do nothing better than that—if, after all, you can only betray us and forsake us, and be no use, no help to any one, it is a shame!”

Who can doubt that Alice’s eloquence was broken with sobs, and her fury all blind with tears? She would not, however, for pride, let him see them fall, but turned away from the door with passionate haste, and flew down the deserted staircase, swallowing her sobs as best she could, and dashing away the hasty torrent from her eyes. She heard him laugh as she got out into the

air in all her agitation, and this sound stung Alice to the heart.

But if she had known it, Paul's laugh was like the ploughboy's whistle to keep his courage up. He had not expected any such onslaught, and he was not insensible to it, any more than she was to his scorn. For, after all, he did not in the least despise his sister, though it was so handy to pretend to do so. When he was left again among his ruins, though he stimulated himself, as by a sickly trumpet note of pretended victory by that laugh, Paul did not feel half so grand a personage as he could have wished, and for the next half hour or so there came and stabbed at him a little array of by no means pleasant thoughts.

In the afternoon, after some hours had elapsed, Paul walked into his father's room with a little air of defiance, and without any apologies. Sir William was seated in an easy chair, looking aged and worn.

"I am very sorry to hear that you have been ill, sir," his son said.

"Yes, I have been ill," said Sir William, "but it will pass off. I think the best thing for me is to get home."

"I should not think you could be very comfortable here," Paul said.

His mother was in the room, and his grievance against her rose up bitterly, and quenched the softer feeling which had moved him at sight of his father's pale face.

"It would perhaps have been better that we had not come. There are many things—that I must see after—in your interests. Paul, do you mean to come home with us? Whatever you may do hereafter, it would be best for you to come home now."

There was a momentary pause.

Sir William put forward no arguments, not even that of his own condition—and used no reproaches. But behind him appeared Lady Markham's face, pale and

pathetic with entreaty. Her eyes were fixed upon her son with a look which he could scarcely withstand. And therefore Paul set his face like a rock, and would not yield.

"I don't see what good it would do, sir," he said. "You know my unalterable resolution. You know my principles, which are so much at variance with yours, and would prevent me from ever taking the position you wish. Why should we worry each other since we can't agree? Besides, other circumstances have arisen," he said, with a vengeful glance at his mother. "But before I sail I shall certainly come to say good-bye."

His mother's faint call after him, "Paul! Paul!" which sounded like a cry of despair, caught at his very heart, but did not bring him back. His feet felt like lead as he went down the stairs. Almost they would not carry him from everything that was in reality most dear to him; but the more nature held him back the more determined was his obstinate will to go. He would come back to say good-bye before he sailed. Was he leaving himself a place of repentance? But at present, though he was wretched, though his heart seemed to have an arrow through it, and his feet were like lead, he would not stay.

This was how it came about that Sir William appeared at Birtwood station, leaning upon the arm of a young man who was not his son. After Paul's visit he had another attack of faintness; and Fairfax, who came back in the evening to put himself at the disposal of the ladies, found them in great agitation, eager to get home again, yet half afraid to venture on the journey. He came back in the morning to help them to get their patient to the railway; and when they got there, Sir William, feeling the advantage of his arm, so held by him, that without either invitation or preparation, the young man, so strangely united to these strangers came with them, not a word being said on the subject. He had

not even a ticket, nor the smallest provision for a visit. What of that? The young fellow was of that light heart and easy temper to which no adventure comes wrong.

CHAPTER XXIII.

PAUL MARKHAM went back to his rooms, and sat down again amid the ruins. His heart was as heavy in his bosom as a lump of lead. It weighed upon him, hindered his breathing, refused to rise or to beat more lightly, let him do what he would. He had taken down his pictures, his china, all that he had thought luxurious, from his walls long before. Nothing remained of all his decorations which he had once loved but a copy of Albert Dürer's *Melancholia*, which he had kept, thinking it symbolical. Besides, it was only a photograph. Had it been an original print, worth a great deal more than its weight in gold, he would not have thought himself at liberty to keep it. He looked round upon his books with gloomy eyes. Ruins—nothing but ruins—all around him! What was the good of them? They had done him all the service they were capable of, and in his life there was no further place for them. No schools now for him, no honours, no need of endless philosophical hair-splitting, this one's theory of being, that one's of knowing. He was going to put all that babble away. There were a few that he might take with him. Theocritus his *Idylls*; grey old Hesiod, that antique husbandman; Plato in his *Republic*. But even Plato, what was the good of him, with all his costly paraphernalia of a new society? Spears would do it all with much less trouble. No long education would be wanted for *his* rulers—if,

indeed, any rulers should be needed. Less trouble ! After all, when he came to think of it, it was by no means sure that Spears's process was less painful, less costly than Plato's. Himself, for example. Would every pioneer who joined their ranks, every leader among them, be obliged to pay his footing as dearly as Paul had done ? To turn his back upon his father and mother, to cast all his antecedents to the winds, everything, from filial affection to the books upon his shelves—it could not be said that this was a cheap or easy probation.

He sat thus for he did not know how long, the sunshine of the August afternoon getting round the corner and streaming straight in, inquisitive and troublesome. What were they doing now at the inn ? Sir William had been very gentle ; he had not said a word of blame. His tone, his looks, his very weakness had been conciliatory. Paul, when he covered his eyes with his hands, seemed to see that scene again, and twinges came to his heart, sudden impulses to get up and go to them—to go at least to the place and ask after his father. There are temptations to do right as well as to do wrong. Impulses came to him like little good angels pulling at his sleeve, entreating him to come ; but alas ! it is always more easy to resist temptations to do well than to do ill. Once or twice he was so far moved that he got up from his chair ; but always sat down again after a blank look from the window over the deserted quadrangle and the parched trees. Why should he go ? It would but raise vain hopes in them that he meant to yield : and he did not mean to yield. This kept him a prisoner in his room ; for if he did not go *there*, where should he go ? He paid no attention to the hour of dinner. He could not, he felt, have gone to Hall where there was the little dinner for the scanty summer contingent, the " men " who were " staying up to read." Even these heroes were dropping away daily, and at the best of times the little group in a

place which held so many was depressing ; and Paul did not want to dine—the common offices of life were disgusting and distasteful to him. He roused himself to go out at last when the daylight had begun to wane. There was to be a meeting that night in the shop of Spears, of the people who were going with them to found the new colony—for to this their plan of emigration had grown ; but it was still too early for that. The shadows were lengthening, the light almost level, when Paul came out. He did not know where to go ; he wandered through the streets where the townspeople were all about enjoying the beautiful evening, and strolled heedlessly, not caring where he went, towards the inn. He could not get out of his mind the recollection of the little party who would get no good of the beautiful evening. His mother and Alice, like most mothers and sisters, had always imagined themselves to be “very fond of Oxford.” They had liked to hear of all its habits, and foolish, youthful ways—the nightly flights from the proctors, the corners where some hairbreadth ‘scape had been made, the “High” and the “Broad,” and all that innocent slang which a happy boy pours forth on his first introduction to these delights. It had always been an excitement, a delight to them to come here. Now he could not but think of them shut up in that bare, gloomy room, with the high, pale walls, and long green curtains. Oh, how they plucked at his sleeve and at his heart, those persuading angels ! How he was tempted to go back again to bid bygones be bygones, to forgive everything (this was his way of putting it) ! But, no. - Had it been the other kind of angel leading him to another kind of presence, most likely the young man would not have stood out half so bravely. He strolled down to the river where one or two melancholy “men” in boats were keeping themselves as retired as possible from the splashing of the released shopboys, and the still more uncomfortable vicinity of the town boats, which were rowed almost as

well as the 'Varsity. The sky was all rosy with sunset, glowing over the long reflections in the water, touching the greenness of the banks and trees into a fuller tint, and making more blue, with all those contrasting tints of rose, the blueness of the sky. The soft summer evening, with a gentle exhaustion in it—sweet langour, yet relief after the heat and work of the day—the soft splash of the oars, the voices all harmonised by the warm air, the movement and simple enjoyment about, were all like so many reproaches to him. How they would have liked to walk with him, to laugh softly back to every sound of pleasure, to talk of everything. Paul said to himself that all that was over. It was a pity for Alice to be shut up in a dingy room, but to-morrow she would be at home among their own woods, and what would it matter? As for himself, it must be his henceforward to tread the stern path of a higher duty—alone.

Paul met with one or two interruptions on the way. He saw Fairfax at a distance, and saw that he avoided him, turning quickly away; and he met one or two others of those who were "staying up to read." Finally he met a being of a different order, less easy to separate himself from, a young Don, who turned and walked with him, anxiously intimating that it was quite immaterial which way he went,—a young man, not much older than Paul himself, but cultivated to the very finger-tips, and anxious to exercise a good influence if that might prove possible. This new companion gave him a stab unawares by asking if it was true what he had heard, that Sir William Markham was ill? Even in a deserted college in the midst of the long vacation, when there happens to be a tragic chapter of life going on, some echo of it will get abroad. The young Don was very modest, and anxious not to offend or intrude upon any "man" in trouble; but yet he would have been glad could he have exercised a good influence. They walked along the river bank while the sunset faded

out of the west, and Paul at last acknowledged the relief of companionship by plunging forth into a statement of his own intentions which filled his auditor with horror and dismay. A man who did not intend to take his degree was as a lost soul to the young Don. But even in these appalling circumstances he could not be impolite. He listened with gentle disapproval and regret, shaking his head now and then, yet saying softly, "I see what you mean," when Paul poured forth a passionate statement of his difficulties, his sense of the injustice of his own position, his horror at the corruption and falsehood of the world, and determination never to sanction, never to accept in his own person the cruel advantages to which he had been born. After all that had come and gone it was a great ease to the young revolutionary, upon such a verge of high devotion yet despair as he was, to make one impassioned assertion of his principles, the higher rule of his conduct. Probably the college, too, and all the men would hear that it was for the love of Spears's daughter that he was throwing his life away. He was glad (when he came to think of it) of this chance of setting himself right. "I see what you mean," said the young Don. He would have said the same thing with the same regretful air, non-argumentative and sympathetic, yet with his own opinion in the background, had Paul poured into his ear a confession of passionate attachment for Janet Spears. He understood what political enthusiasm was, and he knew that the world might be well lost for love, though he did not approve either of these passions. In either case he would have been very glad to have established a good influence over the man thus carried away, whether by the head or the heart. Paul, however, if he did not come under any good influence, was solaced by his own outburst. He got cooler as they turned back towards the towers now rising dimly into the cooled and softened atmosphere of the night, and the glimmer of the friendly lights.

It was a disappointment to the young Don when his companion left him abruptly, long before they reached their college. He had meant to be very kind to him at this violent crisis of life, and who could tell, perhaps to win him back to safer views—at least to put before him so forcibly the absolute necessity of taking his degree that passion itself would be forced to pause. But Paul did not give him this chance. He said a hurried good-night when they reached the spot at which he had met his mother in the morning, the point at which the picturesque and graceful old street was crossed by the line of uneven thoroughfares, in which Spears's house lay. The young Don looked after him in surprise and disappointment as he walked away. He shook his head. He would not doubt the authenticity of Paul's confession of faith, but the low street breathed out of it a chill of suspicion. He could understand anything that was theoretical however wrong-headed, but Spears's shop and the street in which it stood was a great deal more difficult to understand.

Paul sped along, relieved of the immediate pressure on his heart, and more determined than ever in his resolution. He had said little in the morning in answer to Spears's question. He had declared that it was not love alone which had brought him there; that there had been nothing feigned in his enthusiasm for that teaching in which the salvation of the world he believed would be found to lie; but further he had said nothing. And Spears had been too much relieved on his own account and was too delicate on his child's, to pursue the subject. To tell the truth, the demagogue, though the kindest of fathers, had not been delighted by the thought that his own favourite disciple, his captive aristocrat, the young hero whom he had won out of the enemy's ranks, and who was his pride, had been all the time only his daughter's lover. The thought had hurt and humbled him. That Paul might love Janet in the second place, might have learned to

love her after his introduction to the shop, was a different matter. The gratification of recovering his own place and influence drove the other question from his mind; and by the time it recurred to him, the delicacy of a mind full of natural refinement had resumed its sway. It was for the lover to open this subject, not the girl or her friends. And though he wondered a little that Paul said nothing more to him, he asked no further question. It was a relief to Paul, on the other hand, not to be called to account. The evil day was deferred at least, if no more, and he was very glad to put it off, to wait for what might happen, to hope perhaps that after all nothing would happen. Paul did not know what had passed or what his mother had said. Her own broken and tremulous confession of wrong, and Janet's consciousness, had been his only guides. He had thought himself for the moment bound to Janet; but perhaps things had not gone so far as he thought; and though he was determined to hold firmly to any bond of honour that might hold him, even though it were not of his own making, yet the sense that his freedom was still intact was an unspeakable relief to him. Since then he had managed to forget Janet; but when he turned his face towards her home it was not so easy to continue to forget. The twilight was brightened by the twinkle of the lamps all the way down the vista of the street, and by a dimmer light here and there from a window. The shutters had been put up in Spears's shop, but the door was open, and in the doorway, faintly indicated by the light behind, stood some one looking out. Paul knew, before he could see, who it was. She was looking out for him. It is hard to find our arrival uncared for by those whom we want to see, but it is, if not more hard, at least far more embarrassing, to find ourselves eagerly looked for by those whom we have no wish to see. Paul's heart sank when he saw the girl, with the long lines of her black gown filling the doorway, leaning out her graceful shoulders

and fair head in an attitude of anxious expectation, looking for him. What could he say to her? The return of her image thus suddenly thrust before him filled him with impatience and annoyance. Yet he could not withdraw himself; he went on without a pause, wondering with a troubled mind how far his mother had committed him, what she expected; what she wanted, this girl who was no heroine, no ideal woman, but only Janet Spears.

Her eyes drooped as he came forward, with a shyness which had in it something of finer feeling than Janet had yet known. He was very dazzling to her in the light of his social superiority. A gentleman! Janet had heard all her life that a gentleman was the work of nature, not of circumstance, that those who arrogated the title to themselves had often far less right to bear it than the working men whom they scorned; but all these theories had passed lightly over her. *She* knew the difference. They might talk what stuff they liked, but that would not make one of them a *Sir*—a man whose wife would be “my Lady,” a dazzling personage who drove in his carriage, who had horses to ride, and men in livery to walk behind him. The other was all talk! fudge! rubbish! but these things were realities. She watched him coming down the street in the grey twilight, in the faint yellow of the lamps. His very walk was different, the way in which he held his arms, not to speak of his clothes, of which even the Sunday clothes of the others bore but the faintest resemblance. Janet’s nature, such as it was, prostrated itself before the finest thing, the highest thing she knew. And if this is noble in other matters, why not in the most important of all? If it is a sign of an elevated soul to seek the best and loftiest, why not in a husband? Janet did not stand upon logic, yet her logic here was far better practically than her father’s. She recognised Paul without a moment’s hesitation as the best thing within her reach, and why should not she

put forth her entire powers to gain the perfection she sought?

"They have not come yet, Mr.—Paul," said Janet, casting down her eyes.

She had always called him Mr. Markham before; but she could not help hoping that now he would tenderly reprove her for the previous title, and bid her call him by his Christian name. Was not this the first step in lovers' intimacy? But this was not what happened. It struck Paul disagreeably to hear his name at all, even with the Mr. before it. His mind rebelled at this half appropriation of him. He could not help feeling that it was cowardly of him to be rough with Janet, who had no power of defending herself; but he could not help it. He brushed past her with a half-sensation of disgust.

"Haven't they?" he said; "never mind. I dare say your father is in."

"Father is not in, Mr. Paul. He's gone to tell Fraser, the Scotchman, to come. He didn't know there was a meeting. I am the only one that is in to keep the house. The girls have gone to the circus—did you know there was a circus?—but I," said Janet, "I don't care for such things. I've stayed at home."

Then there was a pause. Paul had gone into the shop, which was swept, and arranged with benches, and a table in the middle, for the emigrants' meeting, and Janet following him so far as to stand in the inner instead of the outer doorway, stood gazing at him by the imperfect light of the lamp. How could she help gazing at him? She expected him to say something. This was not how he had looked at her in the morning. Poor Janet was disappointed to the bottom of her heart.

"That's a pity," said Paul, brusquely. "If I had known Spears would not be here I should not have come so soon. I don't see why he should keep me waiting for him. I have a thousand things to do; all my time

is taken up. I might have been with my father, who is ill, if I had not come here."

"Oh, is he ill?" said Janet. Her eyes grew bigger in the dim light gazing at him. "It must be very strange to be a gentleman's son like that," she added softly; "and to think what a difference it might make all at once if—— And you never can tell what may happen," she concluded with a sigh of excitement. "I don't wonder you're in a way."

"Am I in a way? I don't think so," said Paul. "I hope there is nothing much the matter with my father," he added, after a little pause.

"Oh!" said Janet, disappointed; but she added, "There will be some time. Some time or other you will be a great man, with a title and all that property. Oh, I wanted to say one thing to you before those men come. What in the world have you to do with *them*, Mr. Paul? They may think themselves ill-used, but you can't think yourself ill-used. Why should you go away when you have everything, everything you can set your face to, at home? Plenty of money, and a grand house, and horses and carriages, and all sorts of things. You can understand folks doing it that have nothing; but a gentleman like you that only need to wish and have, whatever can *you* want to emigrate for?" Janet cried.

CHAPTER XXIV.

SPEARS entered the shop suddenly, before Janet had quite ended her astonishing address. If his dog had offered him advice Paul could scarcely have been more surprised. He was standing at one end of the shop gazing at her, his eyes wide opened with surprise, and consternation in his mind, when her father came in. Spears was not so much astonished as Paul was. He

saw his daughter standing in the doorway, her colourless face a little flushed by her earnestness, and gaining much in beauty from that heightened tint, and from the meaning in it. Spears thought within himself that it was true what all the romancers said, that there was nothing like love for embellishing a woman, and that his Janet had never looked so handsome before. But that was all. He had come in by a back way, bringing with him the Scotchman, Fraser, who was to be one of the colonists, and therefore could not make any remark upon the conjunction of these two, or upon the few words he heard her saying. What so natural as that she should be found lingering about the place where Paul was expected, or that he should take her opinion, however foolish it might be?

"Come, you two," Spears said, good-humouredly, "no more of this—there is a time for everything;" and Janet, with a start, with one anxious look at Paul to see what effect her eloquence was having, went slowly away.

Paul had been profoundly astonished by what she said. He could not understand it. *She* to bid him remain at home!—she to ask him with fervour, and almost indignation, what he wanted to emigrate for!—she, her father's daughter, to remind him of those advantages which her father denounced! Paul felt himself utterly bewildered by what she said. There was nothing in him which helped him to an understanding of Janet's real meaning. That her severely practical mind regarded her father's creed as simple folly and big words might have been made credible to him: but that Janet had a distinct determination, rapidly formed, but of the most absolute force, not to permit himself—him—Paul—to give up any advantages which she had the hope of sharing—that she was determined to taste the sweets which he had set his foolish heart on throwing away—no idea of this entered into his mind. Her warning look—the little gesture of leave-taking which she made

as she went away, and into which she managed to convey the same warning—overwhelmed him with amazement. What did she mean? He might have thought there was some secret plan against him from which she meant to defend him, if he had not had absolute confidence in Spears. Was it an effort of generosity on her part to free him from the dilemma in which his mother's indiscretion had placed him—to put him away from the place in which her company might be a danger to him—to restore him to the sphere to which he belonged? For the first time with this idea a warm impulse of gratitude and admiration moved him towards the demagogue's daughter. He waved his hand to her as she went away, with a smile which made Janet's heart jump, and in which indeed no great strain of imagination was required to see a lover's lingering of delight and regret as the object of his affection left him. Spears laughed; he saw no deficiency.

"Come, come," he said, "we have more serious work in hand. Leave all that to a seasonable moment." And upon the man's face there came a smile—soft, luminous, full of tender sympathy. In his day he too had known what love was.

Fraser was an uncouth, thick man, short of stature, with that obscuration of griminess about him which sometimes appears in the general aspect of a labouring man. He was not dirty, but he was indistinct, as seen through a certain haze of atmosphere, which, however, from his side was penetrated by two keen eyes. He gave Paul a quick look, then, with a word of salutation, took his seat at the table, on which a paraffin lamp, emitting no delightful odour, was standing. As he did so two others came in. One a lean man, with spindle limbs and a long pale face, who looked as if he had grown into exaggerated pale length, like some imprisoned plant struggling upwards to the distant light. The other was a clerk, in the decent, carefully arranged dress which distinguishes his class, very neat and

respectable, and "like a gentleman," though a world apart from a gentleman's ease of costume. The tall man was Weaver; the clerk's name was Short. They took their seats also with brief salutations. There was room around the table for several more, but these seemed all that were coming. Spears took his place at the head. He was by far the most living and life-like of the party.

"Are we all here?" he said. "There are some vacant places. I hope that doesn't mean falling away. Where is Rees, Short? What has become of him? It was you that brought him here."

"He has heard of another situation," said the clerk. "His wife never liked it. I doubt much whether we'll see him again. He never was a man to be calculated upon. Hot at first—very hot—but no stamina. I warned you, Spears."

"And Layton—he was hot too—has he dropped off as well?"

"Well, you see, Spears," said the long man, with laboured utterance, working his hand slowly up and down, "work's mended in our trade; there's a deal in that. When it's bad a man's ready for anything; as it was all the early summer—not a thing doing. There were dozens on us as would have gone anywhere to make sure of a bit o' bread. But work's mended, and most of us think no more on what we've said. Not me," the speaker added; "I'm staunch. It's nothing to me what the women say."

"I suppose you have got the maps and all the details?" said the clerk. "If we're going out in October, we'd better settle all the details without delay."

Then there arose a discussion about the land that was offered by the emigration commissioners, which it is needless to reproduce here. It was debated between Spears, Fraser, and the clerk, all of whom threw themselves into it with heat and energy, the eyes of the

grimy little Scotchman gleaming on one after another, throwing sudden light like that of a lantern; while Short talked with great volubility and readiness, and Spears, at the head of the table, held the balance between them. Fraser was for closing with the official offer, and securing land before they made their start, while the clerk held in his hand the plans of a new township and the proposals of a land company, which seemed to him the most advantageous. Spears, for his part, was opposed to both. He was for waiting until they had arrived at their destination, and choosing for themselves where they would fix their abode. He, for his part, had no money to buy land, even at the cheapest rate. To take his family out, to support them during the first probationary interval, was as much as he could hope for. The debate rose high among them. Weaver sat with his two elbows resting on the table, and his long pale head supported in his hands, looking from one to another; his mouth and eyes were open with perennial wonder and admiration. Land! he had never possessed anything all his life, and the idea inflamed him. Paul had never taken any part in these practical discussions; he was too logical. If it was wrong for him to enjoy the advantages of wealth at home, he did not see how he could carry any of these advantages away with him, to purchase other advantages on the other side of the world. What right had he to do it? He sat silent, but less patient than Weaver, less admiring, feeling the peculiarities of the men doubly, now that he had associated himself conclusively with them. The clerk's precise little tone, cut and dry—his disquisition upon the rates of interest and the chances of making a good speculation—Fraser's dusky hands, which he put forward in the heat of argument, beating out emphatic sentences with a short, square forefinger—gave him an impression they had never done before. Short was a little contemptuous (notwithstanding the democratical views which he

shared) of the working men, and their knowledge of what ought to be done.

"With the small means at our command," he said, "to go out into the bush would be folly. You can't grow grain or even potatoes in a few weeks. You must have civilisation behind you, and a town where you can push along with your trades till the land begins to pay."

"And how are you to make the land pay without the plough, and somebody to guide it?" said Fraser. "I am not one that holds with civilisation. Most land will pay that's well solicited with a good spade and a good stout arm. We'll take a pickle meal with us, or let's say flour, and the time the corn's growing we'll build our houses and live on our porridge. I do not approve of the Government, but it makes a good offer, and land cannot run away. Make yourself sure of a slice of the land; that is what I'll always say."

"Land," said Spears, with some scorn in his tone, "that may be in the middle of a marsh, or on the cold side of a hill. I put no faith in the Government offer for my part, and a little less than none in your new township, Short. Did you ever read about Eden in Mr. Dickens's book? I object to be slaughtered with fever for the sake of a new land company. Here is my opinion: Take your money with you as you please—in your old stocking, or in bits of paper—I," said the demagogue, "feel the superiority of a man that has no money to take. I've got my head and my hands, and I mean to get *my* farm out of them. But let's see the place first and choose. Let's try the forest primeval, as they call it; but let us take our choice for ourselves."

Fraser, who had projected himself half across the table leaning upon his elbows, and with his emphatic blunt forefinger extended in act to speak, here interposed, pointing that member at Paul, who said nothing. "What's he going to do? Hasn't *he* got an opinion on the subject! I'm keen to know what a lad will say

that has the most money to spend, and the most to lose—and a young fellow forbye ;” said the Scot, flashing the light of his eager eyes upon Paul, who sat half-interested, half-disgusted, holding his refined head, and white hands, and fine linen, a little apart from the group round the table. He started slightly when he heard himself appealed to.

“If it is a false position to possess more than one’s neighbours here,” he said, “I hold it a still more false position to take what ought to be valuable to the country out of the country. I have very little money either to spend or to lose, and I think with Spears.”

“Ah,” said the Scotsman, “my lad, it’s a frolic for you. You’ll go and you’ll play at what is life or death to us—and by the time you’re tired of the novelty you’ll mind upon your folk at home, and your duty to them. I’ve seen the like before. None like you for giving rash counsels : not that you mean harm : but you know well you’ve them behind you that will be too glad to have you back. That’s not our case—with us it’s life or death.”

“Hold your tongue, Fraser,” said Spears. “This young fellow,”—he laid his hand upon Paul as he spoke, with a kind, paternal air, which perhaps the young man might have liked at another time, but which made him wince now—“is in earnest—no sort of doubt that he’s in earnest. He is giving up a great deal more than any of us are doing. We—that’s the worst of it—are making no sacrifice—we’re going because it suits us ; but, to show his principles, he is giving up—a great deal more than was ever within our reach.”

“A man cannot give up more than he has got,” said the clerk. “What we are sacrificing is every bit as much to us.”

Spears kept his hand on Paul’s arm. He meant it very kindly, but it was warm and heavy, and Paul had all the desire in the world to pitch it off. He did not care for the paternal character of his instructor’s kindness.

"I don't know what you are giving up," said Spears. "I have got nothing to sacrifice, except perhaps a little bit of a perverse liking for the old country, bad as she is. It takes away a good deal of my pride in myself, if the truth were known, to feel that after all the talk I've gone through in my life, it isn't for principle that I'm going, but to better myself. I told this young fellow he oughtn't to go—that is the truth. He has no reason to be discontented. As long as the present state of things holds out, it's to his interest, and doubly to his interest, to stay where he is. But this isn't the kind of fellow to stand on what's pleasant to himself. He's coming for the grand sake of the cause—eh, Paul?—or if there's another little bit of motive alongside, why, that's nothing to anybody. We are not going to make a talk of that."

To imagine anything more distasteful to Paul than this speech would be impossible. Only by the most strenuous exercise of self-control could he keep from thrusting off Spears's hand, his intolerable approval, and still more intolerable pleasantry. He got up at last, unable to bear it any longer. "We didn't come here to comment on each other's motives," he said. "Suppose you go on with the business we met for, Spears."

It was a little relief to get out of reach of the other's hand. He stood up against the narrow little mantelpiece behind Spears's chair. It was heaped with picture-frames, and the drawing which Spears had been making in the morning stood there propped up against the wall; the great foxglove from which he had designed it lay in a heap along with the other flowers which he had rejected, swept up into the fireplace. A faint odour of crushed stalks and broken flowers came from them. They were swept up carelessly with the dust, their bright petals peeping from under all the refuse of the shop, dishonoured and broken. Paul thought it was symbolical. He stood and looked—more dispassionately from a distance—at

the rough, forcible head of the demagogue, and the countenance all seamed and grimy of the Scotsman, who was concentrating the keen light of his eyes upon Spears. The clerk, on the other hand, clean, neat, and commonplace, did not seem to belong to the same world, while the feeble, long head of Weaver was as the ghost and shadow of the other animated and vigorous faces. The light of the mean little paraffin lamp threw a yellow glow on them, but left in darkness all the corners of the shop, the large shuttered window, full of picture-frames, and the cavernous opening of the stairs which led to Spears's house—and filled the place with an odour which the accustomed senses of the others took no notice of, but which to Paul was almost insupportable. He had assisted at these conferences before; but however he had busied himself in the details of the meetings, however earnestly and gravely he had posed (to his own consciousness) as one of them, yet he had never been one of them. He had been a spectator, not an actor in the drama, little referred to, scarcely believed in by the others; and he had taken them calmly, as it is so easy to take those with whom we have nothing to do. But now that he was entirely committed to their society, now that he had burnt his ships, and shut every door of escape behind him, a new light seemed to shine upon them. The smoky lamp, the smell of the paraffin, the grimy haze about Fraser, the feeble whiteness of the other, the little clerk, all smooth and smug, with his talk of capital and interest—Paul seemed never to have seen them before. These were to be henceforward his companions, fellow-founders of a new society.

Paul felt himself grow giddy where he stood. Their talk went on; they discussed and argued, but it was only a kind of hum in his ears. He did not care what conclusion they came to—they themselves struck him like a revelation. Perhaps if any other four men in the world had thus been separated from all others as

the future sharers of his life, his feelings would have been much the same. Four Dons for instance; suppose a group out of the Common-room put in the place of these workmen, would they have been more supportable? He asked himself this question vaguely, wistfully. Could he have put his future in their hands with more confidence? or was it simply that the contemplation of any such group as representing all your society for the rest of your life was alarming? Paul put this question to himself with a curious dizziness and sense of weakness.

The stair, which has been several times referred to, went straight up like a ladder from the side of the shop opposite the door, and the upper part of it was of the most primitive description, mounting as through a large trap-door to the floor above. As he stood listening without hearing, seeing through a mist, Paul caught sight in the darkness of some one standing under the shadow of this stair watching and listening. The men at the table were closely engaged. They took no further notice of the young man whom they could not believe in as one of themselves. Even Spears, in the fervour of discussion, forgot Paul. He stood in all the freedom of a bystander, thinking his own thoughts, while his eyes rested upon the group, taking in the whole picture before him vaguely, as a picture; and it was at this moment that he became aware, not only of this vague and shadowy figure, but of a head put out round the corner of the stair, with a dart and tremble of curiosity. It was the fair head of Janet Spears, with all its frizz of loose locks. At first it was but a dart, rapid and frightened; then, as she perceived the absorption of the others, and saw that she had caught Paul's attention, she took courage. She gave a glance at them as Paul was doing, but with a hundred times more conscious scorn, and then put all the contempt and ridicule of which eyes were capable into the look with which she turned to Paul, shrugging her shoulders at the group.

Her next proceeding was to point to the door, and invite him, as plainly as signs could do it, to meet her there. Paul grew red as he received these signs, with wonder and alarm, and a curious kind of shamefacedness. Was it the strangest unpardonable liberty the girl was taking? or had she a right to do it? With a rapid gesture she gave him to understand that he must come out, and that he would find her at the door.

Janet had never been presuming; she had not been a coquette; she had done nothing to call to herself the attention of the young theorists who frequented her father's shop. But everything was different now, and she felt herself not only at liberty to make signals to Paul, but conferring a favour on him by so doing. He was sick of the consultation in which he did not care to take any part, and weary at heart of all the strange circumstances around him. And the paraffin was very disagreeable. Why should he not obey Janet's signs, and go and meet her outside? At least it could not be any worse than this. After a few moments of struggle with himself, Paul announced quietly that he was going. "My presence can make no difference," he said. They scarcely heard him, so busy were they with their argument. No Rembrandt could have surpassed the curious group of heads set in the surrounding darkness, with the light of the lamp so fully upon them, and all so intent and full of living interest. Spears turned round and gave him a good-humoured nod as he went away. He was half-vexed to be deserted; yet he smiled—was it not natural? Outside, though it was a little bye-street, and not immaculate, the air was sweeter than in that atmosphere of paraffin; but it was with a curious sense of humiliation and surprise at his own position, that Paul saw Janet's dark, slim figure stealing out at another door. That he should meet a girl under the light of a street-lamp, jostled by passers-by, remarked upon as Janet Spears's lover, seemed something incredible. Yet he was doing it; he scarcely could tell

why. She came stealing close up to him, with just the attitude and gesture he had seen in other humble pairs of love-makers, and Paul could not help wondering, with a sharp sting of self-scorn, whether he was as like the ordinary hero of such encounters as she was like the heroine. Janet came up to him however with all the fervour of a purpose. She put out her hand, and gave a touch to his arm.

"Did you hear what I said?—did you think of what I was saying?" she asked. "Father came just when he wasn't wanted. Perhaps you'll think me a bold girl to call you out here; but it's for your good. Oh, Mr. Paul, don't listen to all that nonsense! What should *you* go away for? You're a deal better off here than you ever would be there. Father may have some excuse. He thinks, I suppose, as he's getting old, and as it would be better for me and the girls to be out there. I don't think so. I'd rather be anything at home. I'd rather take a situation. Still, father has an excuse. But you—what do you want among men like them?—you that are a gentleman. You never could put up with them. And why should you go?—think a moment—why should you go?"

"It is very good of you to interest yourself about me," said Paul, feeling himself so much stiffer and more solemn than he had ever been before, "but I have chosen with my eyes open. I have done what I thought best."

"Oh, *of course* I interest myself in you. Who should I interest myself in?" cried Janet, "above everything! And that is why I say don't meddle with them; don't have anything to do with them. Oh, when you have a father that will give you whatever you like; when you have your pockets full of money; when, if you just wait a little, you will have a title, and everything heart could desire—*why* should you go a long sea voyage, and mix yourself up with a parcel of working men? '*Why?*'" cried Janet, with a wonderment that was

slightly mingled with scorn, yet was impassioned in its vehemence. "I would not demean myself like that, not for all the world."

Paul stood and looked at her almost moved to laughter by the strangeness of the position. Spears's daughter! but the laughter would not have been sweet. That strange paradox, and the still stranger one of his own meeting with his supposed love under the lamp-post, filled him with the profoundest mortification, wonder, and yet amusement. It seemed beyond the power of belief, and yet it was true.

CHAPTER XXV.

SIR WILLIAM was better when he got home. When he reached his own house he began to hold up his head, to hold himself, if not erect as of old, yet in a way more like himself. He walked firmly into the house, always with Fairfax's arm, and said, "I am better, Brown; yes, much better," when Brown met him, very anxious and effusive, at the door. "I feel almost myself," he said, turning round to Lady Markham. And so he looked—himself ten years older, but yet with something of the old firmness and precise composure. How he could thus recover, though the letter in his pocket-book bore the postmark of Markham Royal, and he had come back into the very presence of the danger which at a distance had overwhelmed him, it would be difficult to tell. "He's picked up wonderful," Mr. Jarvis, Sir William's own man, said to Mr. Brown; "but for all that, he's got notice to quit—he have. Just see if I ain't right." Mrs. Fry was of the same opinion when she saw her master. She had never had any comfort in her mind, she declared, since she heard of these faintings. All the Markhams went like that. The late Sir Paul

had done just the same—nothing to speak of at first, and nobody alarmed—but it was a thing that went fast, that was, Mrs. Fry said. They were all very gloomy about Sir William down stairs, but in the family there was no such alarm. He put away his trouble, or rather, as he emerged out of the suffering of his attack into physical comfort again, and no longer felt the blood ebbing, as it were, from his heart, and consciousness failing in the giddy void into which he had seemed to sink, nature in him declined to remember it, turned away from it. The familiar house, the waving of the woods, the stately quiet about him, healed him; and he would not allow himself to be pulled back. He came to dinner, and occupied his place as usual, looking really, his wife and daughter thought, almost quite himself. This almost made up to them, poor ladies, for the moment—for all that it had cost them to leave Oxford in such melancholy uncertainty about Paul.

But there was one of the party who was not at his ease. Fairfax, who had come away on the spur of the moment without any provision for a visit, and who felt his presence here to be mere accident, nothing more, scarcely knew what to do or say. After he had helped Sir William up stairs on their arrival, he came to Lady Markham, confused yet smiling, with his hat in his hand. "I must take my leave now. I hope Sir William will go on mending, and no longer have need of my arm as a walking-stick."

"Your leave!" said Lady Markham, "what does that mean? Do you think after taking the use of you all the way here that I am going to let you go away without making acquaintance with Markham? No, no; you are going to stay."

"I came as a walking-stick," said the young man; "and I have brought nothing," he added, laughing. "That is the disadvantage of a walking-stick which is human, which wants tooth-brushes and all kinds of

things. Besides, I am of no further use. Sir William is better, and there are shoals of men here."

"You make us out to be pleasant people," said Lady Markham, "getting rid of our friends as soon as we have need of them no longer. That will never do. You must send for your things, and in the meantime there is Paul's wardrobe to fall back upon. He always leaves a number of things here."

"But——" said Fairfax, flushing very deeply. He was not handsome, like Paul. There was a look of easy good-humour, kindness, sympathy about him, a desire to please, a readiness to be serviceable. He had brown eyes, which were clear and kind; brown hair, crisp and curling; a pleasant mouth; but nothing in his features or his aspect that could be called distinguished. Pleasure, embarrassment, difficulty, a desire to say something, yet a reluctance to say it, were all mingled in his face; but the pleasure was the strongest. He gave an appealing look at Alice, as if entreating her to help him out.

"I want no buts," said Lady Markham. "I want to go to Sir William, and you are detaining me with a foolish argument which you know you cannot convince me by. Send for your things, and Brown will show you your room: and we can talk it all over," she said, smiling, "as soon as your portmanteau is here."

Fairfax made her an obeisance as he might have done to a queen. He stood with his hat in his hand and his head bowed while she passed him going out of the room. Every young man, it is to be supposed, has some youthful feminine ideal in his mind, but to Fairfax Lady Markham was a new revelation. He knew, if not by experience, yet from all the poets, that there were creatures like her daughter in the world; that they were the flower and blossom of humanity, supposed to be the most beautiful things in life; but the next step from the Alices of creation was into a darkness he knew nothing of. Age, or a youth that was pretended,

false, and disgusting, swallowed up all the rest. A mother (he had never known his own) was an old stager or an old campaigner, a dragon or a matchmaker, the gaoler or the executioner of her girls, the greatest danger to all men; scheming with deadly wiles to get rid of her daughters; then, in the terrible capacity of mother-in-law, using all these wiles to get the girls who had escaped from her, back, and make the lives of their husbands miserable. This is the conception which the common Englishman gets from his light literature of all women who are not young. Fairfax was no worse than his kind; he had never known his own mother, and the name was not sacred to him. But when Lady Markham came within his ken the young man was bewildered. He could understand Alice, but he could not understand the woman who was so beautiful and gracious, and yet Markham's mother. She dazzled him, and filled him with shame and generous compunction. Her very smile was a fresh wonder. He was half afraid of her, yet to disobey or rebel against her seemed to him a thing impossible. The revelation of this mother even changed the character of his relations with Alice, for whom, on the first sight of her, the natural attraction of the natural mate, the wondering interest, admiration, and pleasure, which, if not love, is the first beginning of the state of love—had caught him all at once. The mother brought a softening as of domestic trust and affection into this nascent feeling. Alice was brought the nearer to him, by some inexplicable magic, because of the dazzling superiority of this elder unknown princess, whose very existence was a miracle to him. When Lady Markham had gone out, with a smile and gracious bend of her head in answer to his reverential salutation, Fairfax came back to Alice with a certain awe in his look, which was half contradicted, half heightened, by the wavering of the smile upon his face, in which there mingled something like amusement at his own sense of awe.

"Miss Markham, may I ask your advice?" he said.

"You are frightened at mamma," said Alice, with a soft laugh. "Oh, but you need not! She is as kind—as kind—as if she were only old nurse," Alice said, in despair of finding a better illustration.

"Don't be profane!" cried Fairfax, with uplifted hands. "Yes, I am frightened. I never knew that anybody's mother could be like that. But, Miss Markham, will you give me your advice?"

"Is your mother—not living, Mr. Fairfax?"

"She never has been for me—she died so long ago; I am afraid I have never thought much about her. Ought I to stay, Miss Markham?" He raised his eyes to her with a piteous look, yet one that was half comic in its earnestness, and a sudden blush, unawares, as their eyes met, flamed over both faces. For why? How could they tell? It was so, and they knew no more.

"Surely," Alice said; "mamma wishes it, and we all wish it. After showing us so much kindness, you would not go away the moment you have come here?"

"But that is not the question," said Fairfax. "The fact is, I am nobody. Don't laugh, or I shall laugh too, and I am much more disposed to cry. I have a tolerable name, haven't I? but alas! it does not mean anything. I don't know what it means, nor how we came by it. I am one of the unfortunate men, Miss Markham, who—never had a grandfather."

Alice had been waiting with much solemnity for the secret which made him so profoundly grave (yet there was a twinkle, too, which nothing but the deepest misfortune could quench, in the corner of his eye). When this statement came, however, she was taken with a sudden fit of laughter. Could anything be more absurd? And yet in her heart she felt a sudden chill, a sense of horror. Alice would not have owned it, but this was a terrible statement for any young man on the verge

of intimacy to make. No grandfather! It was a misfortune she could not understand.

"At least, none to speak of," he said, the fun growing in his eyes. "You should not laugh, Miss Markham. Don't you think it is hard upon a man? To come to an enchanted palace, where he would give his head to be allowed to stay, and to feel that for no fault of his, for a failure which he is not responsible for, which can be laid only to the score of those ancestors who did not exist——"

"Mr. Fairfax, no one was thinking of your grandfather."

"I know that; but, dear Miss Markham, you know very well that to-night, or to-morrow night, or a year hence, your mother, before whom I feel disposed to go down upon my knees, will say with her smile, 'Are you of the Norfolk Fairfaxes, or the Westchester family, or——?' And I, with shame, will begin to say, 'Madam, of no Fairfaxes at all.' What will she think of me then? Will not she think that I have done wrong to be here—that I had no right to stay?"

"Oh, Mr. Fairfax!" cried Alice, somewhat pale and troubled; "how can I advise you? Mamma is not a fanatic about family. She does not build upon it to that extent. I do not see why she should ever ask you. It is no business of ours." Alice was not strong enough to have such a tremendous question thrown upon her to decide. As a matter of fact, she knew that her mother would very soon make those inquiries about the Westchester family and the Norfolk Fairfaxes. Already Lady Markham had indulged in speculations on the subject, and had begun to remember that in the one case she "used to know" a cousin of his, and in the other had met his uncle, the ambassador, and saw a great deal of him once in Paris. She grew quite pale, and her eyes puckered up and took the most anxious aspect. Besides, it was a shock to herself. That absence of a grandfather was a want which was almost indecent.

She did not understand it, and she was extremely sorry for him. He had no home then—no house that his people had lived in for ages—no people. Poor boy!

And Fairfax's countenance also fell, in reflection of hers. However deep may be one's private consciousness of one's own deficiencies, there is always a little expectation in one's mind that other people will make light of them; but when you see your own dismay, and more than your own dismay, in the eyes of your counsellor, then is the moment when you sink into the abyss. His lip quivered for a moment, and though it eventually succeeded in forming into a smile, the smile was very tremulous and uncertain.

"I see," he said; "no need for another word. Good-bye. I have had a glimpse into—the garden of Eden, though I must not stay."

"Mr. Fairfax!" cried Alice, as he turned away. "Come back—come back this moment! How dare you take me up so? Do you want to get me into trouble," she cried, half crying, half laughing, "with mamma? Would you like to have her—beat me?"

"She does so sometimes?"

"To be sure," cried Alice, with an unsteady laugh. "Oh, Mr. Fairfax, what a fright you have given me! You have made my heart beat!"

"Not so much as mine," he said. They had their laugh, and then they stood once more looking at each other. "It is all very well," said the young man; "you want to spare my feelings; you would not hurt any one. But beyond that, you know as well as I do that Lady Markham, knowing who I am, would not like to have me here."

"Who are you?" said Alice, with a little renewed alarm; and in her mind she tried to remember whether there had been any trials in the papers, any criminals who bore this name.

"I am nobody at all," said Fairfax. "I haven't even the distinction of being improper, or belonging to

people who have made themselves notable either for evil or good. I am nobody. That is precisely what I want Lady Markham to understand."

"I think, Mr. Fairfax," said Alice, "you had better go and send for your things, as mamma said."

"You think I may?"

He looked at her with eyes full of pleasure and gratitude, putting more meaning into her words than they would bear, and getting a thrill of conscious happiness out of the little arbitrary tone which, half in jest and half to hide her real doubts, Alice put on. He was so glad to obey, to say to himself that it was their own doing and that they could not blame him for it, so happy to be made to remain as he persuaded himself. The children rushed in as he went away to obey what he called to himself the order he had received, eager to know who he was, and making a hundred inquiries about all kinds of things—about papa's illness, why he looked so grey, and what was the matter with him; about Paul, why he did not come home; about Mr. Fairfax, who he was, what he was, what he was doing there, whether he was going to stay. There was scarcely a question that could be put on these subjects which the ingenious children did not ask; and Alice was glad finally to suggest that they should walk to the village with Mr. Fairfax and show him where the post-office was, that he might telegraph for his portmanteau. They were quite willing to take this on themselves. "We shall be sure to see the little gentleman," Bell said. "Who is the little gentleman?" asked Alice; but she had so many things to think of that she did not pay any attention to the reply, which was made by all the four voices at once. What did it matter? She had a hundred things so much more important to think of.

And when the children had been sent off, forming a guard of honour about Fairfax, cross-examining him to their heart's content, and in their turn communicating

much information which was quite novel to him, Alice thought she was very glad of the quiet and the interval of rest. Sir William was resting, declaring himself much better; and Lady Markham, in the relief of this fact, was lying down on the sofa, getting half an hour's doze after her sleepless night. Alice had not slept much more than her mother, but she could not doze. After a while a sensation of regret stole into her mind that she had not accompanied the others. There was a soft breeze blowing among the trees which freshened the aspect of nature, and the sky was blue and tender, doubly blue after the smoky half-colour of a town. Alice sat by the window and watched the flickering of the leaves, and wished she had gone with them. Something seemed wanting to her. To be alone and free to rest, did not seem the privilege she had thought it. She wanted—what? Some one to speak to, some one's eyes to meet hers. The leaves ruffled and seemed to call her; the little breeze came and whispered at the edge of the window, blowing the lace curtains about. All the world invited her, wooed her, to go out into the fresh air, into the green avenue, into the joyful yet silent world. "The air would have done me good," Alice said to herself; and her voice came back to her out of the silence as if it had been somebody else's voice. Then by degrees it came into her head that the air would still do her good if she went out now, which somehow did not exactly hit her wishes. After this, however, it occurred to her that to stroll down the avenue and meet them as they came back would not be amiss, and much comforted by this suggestion she ran to get her hat. Would they be glad to see her, or would they ask her loudly why she came out now, when nobody wanted her. Brothers and sisters under fourteen are apt to express opinions of this sort very plainly. Alice felt angry at the idea, but afterwards melted, and represented to herself that to meet them in

the avenue was of all the courses open to her the best.

Sir William was able to come down stairs to dinner, which was more than any one had hoped, and after dinner he came into the dining-room with the ladies, and saw the children, as he had always been in the habit of doing, while he took his coffee. A recovery of this kind from a sudden fit of illness has often the most softening and happy effect. He had a great deal of care on his mind, but the sensation of getting better seemed to chase it all away. He seemed to be getting better of that too, to be getting over it, before it ever came to anything. Had he been in his usual condition he would have known very well that he had got over nothing, that it was all waiting for him round the corner of the very next day, or even hour; but Sir William convalescent was not in his usual state of mind. He felt as if he had got over it, as if it all lay behind him—the perplexity, and the trouble, and alarm. He sat in his great chair, with cushions placed about him, looking so much older, and so much softer, more indulgent and more talkative. A kind of garrulousness had come upon him. He told his children stories of his own childhood. He was not put out by their restlessness, by their interruptions, as he generally was. Never had he been so gentle, so amiable. He told them all about an adventure of his in the woods with his brothers, when he had been about Roland's age. It was like the story of old Grouse in the gun-room to the little Markhams; they knew exactly where to laugh, and what questions to ask to show their interest, and they conducted themselves with the greatest propriety, not even putting him right when he deviated from the correct routine of the story, which they remembered better than he did. It was only after this wonderful tale was over that Bell made the unfortunate remark which brought a new transformation. How should the child know there was any harm in it?

"Oh," she cried suddenly, "look, Harry! look, Marie! As papa sits there, now! Did you ever see anything so like the little gentleman?" and Bell clasped her hands together in admiring contemplation of this strange fact.

There was a pause. Had it not been for the entire ignorance of the easy household, calm, and fearing no evil, it might have been thought that a shiver ran through the air, as this crisis suddenly developed itself out of the quiet: every one was quite still. They all looked at the child with amused curiosity—all but one. And though there was nothing meant by it the effect was strange. It was left to Sir William to speak, which he did in a clear, thin voice, suddenly becoming judicial and solemn.

"Whom do you mean by the little gentleman, Bell?"

"Oh, he is a relation—he told us so," said the little girl.

"And he has brought me some sweetmeats from abroad—me!—though he didn't know my name. What sort of things would you call sweetmeats, mamma?"

"And he is living down at the Markham Arms. We saw him to-day. He jumped into the railway carriage with Dolly Stainforth."

"Oh, but I saw him come back—following the carriage," cried Roland. "He stood at the station-gate to see you pass, papa, and looked so sorry. That was him, Alice, that stopped us when we went to the village with Mr. Fairfax. You saw him. He wanted to shake hands all round."

The pause now, after this clamour of voices, was more curious than ever. Lady Markham began to wonder a little.

"A relation!—who could it be? Do you know of any relation who would not have come to us straight? I do not think it could be a relation. You must have made a mistake."

"Oh, no; we have not made any mistake," cried the children with one voice. "Besides, he was such friends with us. He promised to give us quantities of things; and then he is like papa."

"I don't think Sir William is well," said Fairfax, hurriedly. He rose up with an exclamation of terror, and Lady Markham sprang to her feet and rushed to her husband's side.

"I am feeling—a little faint," he said, in a half-whisper, with a tremendous attempt to regain command of himself; but it failed. His head drooped, his eyelids quivered, and then lay half-closed upon the dim langour underneath that had lost all power of seeing; his breath laboured, and came in gasps from his pale lips. All the sudden recovery in which they had been so happy was over. Alice put the children hastily out of the room, like a flock frightened, as she ran to call Jarvis, to get what was necessary, to send for the village doctor. The boys and girls got together into a corner of the hall and cried silently, clinging together in fright and sorrow; or at least the girls cried, wondering—

"Was it anything we said?"

"Oh, I wish—I wish!" cried Bell, but in a whisper, "that I had not said anything about the little gentleman!"

But of all the family she was the only one that thought of this. The others though they were much alarmed were not surprised. There was nothing, alas! more natural than that these fits should come on again. The doctor had expected it. They said to each other that he had been more tired with the journey than they supposed—that indeed it was certain in his state of health that he must be worn out by the journey: the wonder only was that he had revived at all. He was carried to his room after a while, the children looking on drearily from their corner, full of dismay. To them nothing seemed to be too dreadful to be expected.

"Oh, why does papa look so pale?" Marie sobbed, with that blighting terror which seizes a child at the first sight of such signs of mortality. Even the boys had much to do to rub away out of the corners of their eyes the sudden burst of tears.

"I am better—much better," the sick man said, when he came to himself, "but very weak. You won't allow me to be disturbed? I cannot see any one—it is impossible for me to see any one, Isabel."

"Do you think I will let you be disturbed?" said Lady Markham. "And who would disturb you? Do you forget, William, that we are at home?"

But that word, so full of consolation, fell upon him with no healing in it. Yes, he knew very well that he was at home, and that his enemy who had been waiting for him all these years—his enemy who meant him no harm, who meant no one any harm—the deadliest foe of the children and their mother, his own reproach and shame—that innocent yet mortal enemy was close to him, lurking among the trees, behind the peaceful houses in the village, to disturb him as no one else could. His wife put back the curtain so as to shield his feeble eyes from the lamp, and sat down—anxious, yet serene—wondering at his strange fancy. Disturb him! Who could disturb him here?

CHAPTER XXVI.

THIS time Sir William did not get better as he had done before. His third fainting-fit proved the beginning of an illness at which the village doctor looked very grave. It was still but a very short time since he had come down from London, relieved at the end of the session, to enjoy his well-earned leisure, with everything prosperous around him, nothing but the little vexation

of Paul's vagaries to give him a prick now and then, a reminder that he too was subject to the ills of mortality. What a happy house it had been to which the tired statesman had come home! When he had taken his seat by the side of Alice in the little pony-carriage there had been nothing but assured peace and comfort in his mind. Paul:—yes—Paul has been a vexation; but no more. Now all that brightness was overcast; the happy children in their holiday freedom were hushed in their own corner of the house no longer allowed to roam through it wherever they pleased. Lady Markham, with all pretty gowns, her lace and ornaments put away, lived in her husband's sick-room, or came down stairs now and then with an anxious smile, "like someone coming to call," the little girls said. Alice had become not Alice, but a sort of emissary between the outside world and that little hidden world up stairs in which the life of the house seemed concentrated. As for Sir William, he lay between life and death. First one, then another great London physician had come down to see him—but all that they could suggest had done him little or no good. All over the country messengers came every day for news of him; the head of the government, and even the Queen herself, and all the leading members of the party sent telegrams of inquiry; and there were already flutters of expectation in the town he represented as to the chances of the Liberal interest, "should anything happen." Even into Lady Markham's mind, as she sat in the silent room, often darkened and always quiet, trying hard to keep herself from thinking, there would come thoughts, dreary previsions of change, floating like clouds across her mental firmament, against her will, in spite of all her precautions—visions of darkness and blackness and solitude which she tried in vain to shut out. Her husband lying so still under the high canopies of the bed, from which all curtains and everything that could obstruct the free circulation of air had been drawn aside, capable of no independent action, but still

the centre of every thought and plan—was it possible to imagine him absent altogether, swept away out of the very life in which he had been the chief actor! These thoughts did not come by any will of hers, but drifted gloomily across her mind as she sat silent, sometimes trying to read, mechanically going over page after page, but knowing nothing of the meaning of the words that were under her eyes. To realise the death of the sufferer whom one is nursing is, save when death is too close to be any longer ignored, not only a shock, but a wrong, a guilt, a horror. Is it not like signing his sentence, agreeing that he is to die? Lady Markham felt as if she had consented to the worst that could happen when these visions of the future drifted across her mind.

Meanwhile who can describe the sudden dreariness of the house upon which in full sunshine of youth and enjoyment this blight came? The boys wished themselves at school—could there be any stronger evidence of the gloom around them?—the girls grew sad and cross, and cried for nothing at all. Fairfax lingered on, not knowing what to do, afraid to trouble the anxious ladies even by proposing to go away, obliterating himself as much as he could, though doing everything that Paul, had he been there, would have been expected to do. Paul did not come till a week after, though he was written to every day—but in that week a great many things had happened. For one thing Lady Markham had seen and spoken with the stranger who was living at the Markham Arms in the village, and who had introduced himself to the children as a relation. She had heard nothing of Mr. Gus except that one mention of him by little Bell on the night of the return, and that had made no great impression on her mind. It had been immediately before the recurrence of Sir William's faint, which had naturally occupied all her thoughts, and how could it be supposed that Lady Markham would remember a thing of such small importance? It surprised her much

to meet in the hall that strange little figure in light, loose clothes, standing hat in hand, as she went from one room to another. Sir William then had been but a few days ill, and Lady Markham had hitherto resolutely kept herself from all those drifting shadows of fear. It was one of the days when she had come to "make a call" on her children. Sir William was asleep, and she persuaded herself that he was better, she had come down, as she said, to tell them the good news; but her smile as she told it was so tremulous, that little Bell, whose nerves had got entirely out of order, began to cry. And then they all cried together for a minute, and were a little eased by it. Alice protested that she was crying for joy because papa was better, and that it was very silly, but she could not help it; and Lady Markham had all the brightness of tears in her eyes as she came out into the hall on her way back to the sick-room; and lo, there before her in the hall, stood the little gentleman, bowing, with his hat in his hand.

"I think you must have heard of me, Lady Markham," he said.

She looked at him, with a kind of horror that a stranger should be able to find and detain her—she who ought to be by her husband's bedside. In her capacity of nurse it seemed almost as great a crime to intercept her as it would be to disturb Sir William; but she was too courteous to express her horror.

"I do not think so," she said, with a conciliatory smile which was intended to take off any edge of offence that might be found in her profession of ignorance. Then she looked at the card which he handed to her. "Perhaps this ought to be given to Brown. Ah! but now I remember. You are related to some kind people, the Lennys, who were here."

"Have the Lennys been here?" said Mr. Gus, with unfeigned surprise. "Yes, I am a relation of theirs also; but in the meantime there is a much nearer relationship."

"I am sure Mr. Gaveston," said Lady Markham, with a smile by which she begged pardon for what she was saying, "that you will not think it rude if I leave you now. I don't like to be long away from Sir William. When he wakes he may miss me."

"Lady Markham," said Mr. Gus, "I wish you would let me speak to you. I do wish it indeed. It would be so much easier afterwards——"

She looked at him with genuine surprise, then with a glance round her up the great staircase, where she wished to go, and round the open doors by which no one came for her deliverance, she yielded unwillingly. "I fear I can only give you a few minutes," she said, and led the way into the library. She had done so without for the moment thinking that her husband's room was scarcely a place in which, at this moment, to discourse placidly with a stranger on subjects of which she was ignorant. It was so full of him. His books, his papers, all arranged as if he had that moment left them; his chair at its usual angle, as if he were seated in it unseen; everything marked with the more than good order, the precision and formal regularity of all Sir William's habits. The things which mark the little foibles of character, the innocent weaknesses of habit, are those which go most to the heart when death is threatening a member of a household. The sight of all these little *fads*, which sometimes annoyed her, and sometimes made her laugh when all was well, gave Lady Markham a shock of sudden pain and sudden *attendrissement*. Her heart had been soft enough before to her husband; it melted now in a suffusion of tender love and grief. Her eyes filled. Might it be that he never should sit at that table again?

"I am sure," she said, making once more the same instinctive appeal to the sympathy of the stranger, "that you will not detain me longer than you can help, for my husband is very ill. I cannot help being very anxious——" She could not say any more.

"I am very sorry, Lady Markham—but that is the very thing that makes it so important. May I ask if it is possible you have never heard of me? Never even *heard* of me!—that is the strangest thing of all."

In her surprise she managed better to get rid of her tears. She gave a startled glance at him, and then at the card she still held in her hand. "I cannot quite say that—for Mrs. Lenny and the Colonel both spoke—I cannot say of you—but of a family called Gaveston whom Sir William had known. You are the son, I presume, of an old friend? My husband, Mr. Gaveston," said Lady Markham, with warmth, "is not a man to be indifferent to old friends. You may be sure he would have been glad to see you, and done his best to make Markham pleasant to you:—but the circumstances—explain——"

"Then," said her strange companion with a certain air of sternness which changed the character of his face, "that is all you know?"

She looked at the card again. How was it she had not noticed the second name before? I see you have Markham in your name," she said; "I had not noticed. Is there then some distant relationship? But Mrs. Lenny never claimed to be a relation: or perhaps—I see! you are Sir William's godson," Lady Markham said, with a smile which was somewhat forced and uncomfortable. She kept her eyes upon him, uneasy, not knowing what might come next, vaguely foreseeing something which must wound her.

Mr. Gus's brown countenance grew red—he gave forth a sharp and angry laugh. "His *godson*," he said; "and that is all you know?"

Lady Markham grew far more red than he had done. Her beautiful face became crimson. The heat of shame and distress upon it seemed to get into her eyes. What was this suspicion that was flung into her mind like a fire-brand? and in this place where her husband's blameless life had been passed, and at this moment

when he was ill, perhaps approaching the end of all things! "Mr. Gaveston," she said, trembling, "I cannot, I cannot hear any more. It is not to me you ought to come, and at such a time! Oh, if you have been put in any false position—if you have been subjected to humiliation, by anything my husband has done——" Her voice was choked by the growing heat and pain of her agitation; even to have such a horrible thought suggested to her now seemed cruelty incredible. It was wrong on her part to allow it to cross the threshold of a mind which was sacred to *him*. "Oh," she cried, wringing her hands, "if you have had anything to suffer, I am sorry for you, with all my heart! but I cannot hear any more now—do not ask me to hear any more now! Another time, anything we can do for you, any amends that can be made to you—but oh, for God's sake, think of the state he is lying in, and say no more now!"

Mr. Gus listened with wonder, irritation, and dismay. That she should be excited was natural, but with respect to their meaning, her words were like raving to him. He could not tell what she meant. Do anything for him, make him amends!—was the woman mad? He only stared at her blankly, and did not make any reply.

Then she held out her hand to him, trying to smile, with her eyes full of tears. "It shall not do you any harm eventually," she said, "your kindness now. Thank you for not insisting now. I have not left—Sir William for so long a time since he was ill."

She made a pause before her husband's name. If it were possible that there might be a link between him and this stranger—a link as strong as——! It made her heart sick to think upon it; but she would not think upon it. It flashed upon her mind only, but was not permitted to stay there: and half because of real anxiety to get back to the sick-room, half from a still greater eagerness to get rid of her visitor, she made a step towards the door.

"If you will let me say so," said Mr. Gus, "you oughtn't to shut yourself up in a sick-room. You may think me an enemy, but I'm no enemy. I wish you all well. I like the children. I think I could be very fond, if she'd let me, of Alice, and I admire you——"

"Sir!" Lady Markham said. She turned her astonished eyes upon him with a blaze in them which would have frightened most men; then opened the door with great stateliness and dignity, ignoring the attempt he made to do it for her. "I must bid you good morning," she said, making him a curtsey worthy of a queen—then walked across the hall with the same dignity; but as soon as she was out of sight, flew up stairs, and, before going to her husband, went to her own room for a time to compose herself. She felt herself outraged, insulted—a mingled sense of rage and wonder had taken possession of her gentle soul. Who was this man, and what could he mean by his claim upon her, his impudent expressions of interest in the family, as if he belonged to the family? Was it not bad enough to put a stigma upon her husband at the moment when he was dying, and when all her thoughts were full of the tenderest veneration for him, and recollection of all his goodness! To throw this shadow of the sins of his youth, even vaguely, upon Sir William's honourable, beautiful age, was something like a crime. It was like desecration of the holiest sanctuary. Lady Markham could not but feel indignant that any man should seize this moment to put forth such a claim—and to make it to *her*, disturbing her ideal, introducing doubt and shame into her love, just at the moment when all her tenderness was most wanted! it was cruel. And then, as if that was not enough, to assume familiarity, to speak of her child as Alice, this stranger, this ——! Delicate woman as she was, Lady Markham, in her mind, applied as hard a word to Mr. Gus as the severest of plainspoken men could have used. She seemed to see far, far back in the mists of distance, a

young man falling into temptation and sin, and some deceitful girl—must it not have been a deceitful girl?—working upon his innocence. This is how, when the heart is sore, such blame is apportioned. He it was who must have been seduced and deluded. How long ago? some fifty years ago, for the man looked as old as Sir William. When this occurred to her, her heart gave a leap of joy. Perhaps the story was all a lie—a fiction. He did look almost as old as Sir William; how could it be possible? It must be a lie.

When she came as far as this she bathed her eyes and composed herself, and went back to her husband's room. He was still asleep, and Lady Markham took her usual place where she could watch him without disturbing him, and took her knitting which helped to wile away the long hours of her vigil. If the knitting could but have occupied her mind as it did her hands! but in the quiet all her thoughts came back; her mind became a court of justice, in which the arguments on each side were pleaded before a most anxious, yet, alas, too clear-sighted judge. This stranger, who figured as the accuser, was arraigned before her, and examined in every point of view. He was strange; he was not like the men whom Lady Markham was used to see; but he did not look like an impostor. She tried to herself to prove him so, but she could not do it. He was not like an impostor. In his curious foreignness and presumption, he yet had the air of a true man. But then, she said to herself, how ignorant, how foolish he must be, how incapable of any just thought or feeling of shame. To come to *her*! If he had indeed a claim upon Sir William, there were other ways of making that claim; but that he should come to her—Sir William's wife—and oh, at such a time! This was the refrain of her thoughts to which she came back and back. As she sat there in the darkened room, her fingers busy with her knitting, her ears intent to hear the slightest movement the sleeper made, this was how

her mind was employed. Perhaps when they had gone through all these stages, her thoughts came back with a still more exquisite tenderness to the sick man lying there, she thought, so unconscious of this old, old sin of his which had come back to find him out. How young he must have been at the time, poor boy!—younger than Paul—and away from all his friends, no one to think of him as Paul had, to pray for him—a youth tossed into the world to sink or to swim. Lady Markham's heart melted with sympathy. And to make up for that youthful folly, in which perhaps he was sinned against as well as sinning, what a life of virtue and truth he had led ever since. She cast her thoughts back upon the past with a glow of tender approval and praise. Who could doubt his goodness? He had done his duty in everything that had been given him to do. He had served his country, he had served his parish, both alike, well; and he had been the Providence of all the poor people dependent upon him. She went over all that part of his career which she had shared, with tears of melancholy happiness coming to her eyes. Nothing there that any one could blame: oh, far from that! everything to be praised. No man had been more good, more kind, more spotless; no one who had trusted in him had ever been disappointed. And what a husband he had been: what a father he had been! If this were true, if he had done wrong in his youth, had he not amply proved that it was indeed but a folly of youth, a temporary aberration—nothing more. Lady Markham felt that she was a traitor to her husband to sit here by his sick-bed and allow herself to think that he had ever been wicked. Oh, no, he could not have been wicked! it was not possible. She went softly to his bedside to look at him while he slept. Though he was sleeping quietly enough, there was a cloud of trouble on his face. Was it perhaps a reflection from the doubt she had entertained of him, from the floating shadows of old evil that had been blown up like clouds upon his waning sky?

CHAPTER XXVII. .

MR. GUS was much startled by the change in Lady Markham's manner, by her sudden withdrawal and altered looks. Had he offended her? He did not know how. He had been puzzled, much puzzled, by all she had said. She had professed to be sorry for him. Why? Of all who were concerned, Gus felt that he himself was the one whom it was not needful to be sorry for. The others might have some cause for complaint; but nothing could affect him—his position was sure. And it was very mysterious to him what Lady Markham could mean when she professed to be ready to make him amends—for what? Gus could afford to laugh, though, indeed, he was very much surprised. But happily the nature of the mistake which Lady Markham had made, and the cause of her indignation were things he never guessed at. They did not occur to him. His position had never been in the least degree equivocal in any way. He had known exactly, and everybody around him had known exactly, what it was. Though he had been adopted as his uncle's heir, he had never been kept in the dark—why should he?—as to whose son he was. And when the poor old planter fell into trouble, and the estate of which Gus was to be the heir diminished day by day, "It does not matter for Gus," the old man had said; "you must go back to your own family when I am gone; there's plenty there for you, if there is not much here." Gus had known all about Markham all his life. An old pencil-drawing of the house, feeble enough, yet recognisable still, had been hanging in his room since ever he could remember. It had belonged to his poor young mother, and since the time he had been able to speak he had known it as home. The idea of

considering "the second family" had only dawned upon him when he began to plan his voyage "home," after his uncle's death. He had heard there were children, and consequently one of his great packing-cases contained many things which children would be likely to value. It gave Gus pleasure to think of little sisters and brothers to whom he would be more like an uncle than a brother. He was fond of children, and he had a very comfortable simple confidence in himself. It had never occurred to him that they might not "get on." It was true that to hear of Paul gave him at first a certain twinge; but he thought it impossible, quite impossible, that Sir William could have let his son grow up to manhood without informing him of the circumstances. Surely it was impossible! There might be reasons why Lady Markham need not be told—it might make her jealous, it might be disappointing and vexatious to her—but he would not permit himself to believe that Paul had been left in ignorance. And Alice, who was grown up, it seemed certain to him that she, too, must know something. He had been greatly moved by the sight of Alice. The young ladies out in Barbadoes, he thought, were not like that, nor did he in Barbadoes see many young ladies; and this dainty, well-trained, well-bred English girl was a wonder and delight to him. Why should he not say that he was fond of Alice? It was not only natural, but desirable that he should be so. He walked out after Lady Markham left him with a slight sense of discomfiture; he could not tell why, but yet a smile at the "flurry" into which she had allowed herself to be thrown. Women were subject to "flurries" for next to no cause, he was aware. It was foolish of her, but yet she was a woman to whom a good deal might be pardoned. And he did not feel angry, only astonished, and half discomfited, and a little amused. It was strange—he could not tell what she meant—but yet in time no doubt, all would be amicably settled, and they would

"get on," however huffy she might be for the moment. Gus knew himself very well, and he knew that in general he was a person with whom it was easy to get on.

But he was a little disappointed to go away—after the hopes he had formed of being at once received into the bosom of the family, acknowledged by Sir William, and made known to the others—without any advance at all. He had spoken to Alice when he met her with the children, and had got "fond of her" on the spot: and he would have liked to have had her brought to him, and to have made himself known in his real character to all the girls and boys. But however, it must all come right sooner or later, he said to himself; and no doubt Lady Markham, with her husband sick on her hands, and her son, as all the village believed, giving her a great deal of anxiety, might be forgiven if she could not take the trouble to occupy herself about anything else. Gus went away without meeting any one, and when he had got out in front of the house, turned round to look at it, as he was in the custom of doing. It was a dull day, drizzly and overcast. This made the house look very like that woolly pencil-drawing, which had always hung at the head of his bed, and always been called home.

As he stood there some one came from behind the wing where the gate of the flower-garden was, and approached him slowly. Gus had not been quite able to make out who Fairfax was. He was "no relation," and there did not even seem to be any special understanding between him and Alice, which was the first idea that had come into the stranger's head. He had spoken to Fairfax two or three times when he had met him with the children, and Gus, who was full of the frankest and simplest curiosity, waited for him as soon as he perceived him. "We are going the same way, and I hope you don't dislike company," he said. To tell the truth, Fairfax had no particular liking for company at that

moment. It seemed to him that he was in a very awkward position in this house where dangerous sickness had come in and taken possession; but how to act, how to disembarass them of his constant presence, without depriving them of his services, which, with natural self-regard he thought perhaps more valuable than they really were, he did not know. The quaint "little gentleman," about whom all the children chattered, seemed for the first moment somewhat of a bore to Fairfax; but after a moment's hesitation he accepted him with his usual good-nature, and joined him without any apparent reluctance. Mr. Gus was very glad of the opportunity of examining at his leisure this visitor whose connection with the family he did not understand.

"I have been asking for the old gentleman," he said. "I have seen Lady Markham. You know them a great deal better than I do, no doubt, though I am—a relation."

"I do not know them very well," said Fairfax. "Indeed, I find myself in a very awkward position. I came here by chance because Sir William fell ill when I was with them, and I was of some use for the moment. That made me come on with them, without any intention of staying. And here I am, a stranger, or almost a stranger, in a house where there is dangerous illness. It is very embarrassing; I don't know what to do."

He had thought Gus a bore one minute, and the next opened all his mind to him. This was characteristic of the young man; but yet in his carelessness and easy impulse there was a certain sudden sense that the support of a third person somehow connected with the Markham family might give him some countenance.

"Then you don't know them—much?" said Mr. Gus, half-satisfied, half-contemptuous. "I couldn't make you out, to tell the truth. Nobody but an old friend or a connection—or some one who was likely to become a connection"—he added, giving Fairfax a keen

sidelong glance, "seemed the right sort of person to be here."

Fairfax felt uneasy under that look. He blushed, he could scarcely tell why. "I can't be said to be more than a chance acquaintance," he said. "It was a lucky chance for me. I have known Markham for a long time. I've known *him* pretty well; but it was a mere chance which brought Sir William to me when they were looking for Markham; and then, by another chance, I was calling when he was taken ill. That's all. I feel as if I were of a little use, and that makes me hesitate; but I know I have no right to be here."

"Who's Markham? The—son, I suppose?"

"Yes, the eldest son. I suppose you know him as Paul. Of course," said Fairfax, with hesitation, "he ought to be here; but there are some family misunderstandings. He doesn't know, of course, how serious it is."

"Wild?" said Mr. Gus, with his little, precise air.

"Oh—I don't quite know what you mean by wild. Viewy he is, certainly."

"Viewy? Now I don't know what you mean by viewy. It is not a word that has got as far as the tropics, I suppose."

Fairfax paused to give a look of increased interest at the "little gentleman." He began to be amused, and it was easy—very easy—to lead him from his own affairs into the consideration of some one else's. "Paul," he said—"I have got into the way of calling him Paul since I have been here, as they all do—goes wrong by the head, not in any other way. We have been dabbling in—what shall I call it?—socialism, communism, in a way—the whole set of us: and he is more in earnest than the rest; he is giving himself up to it."

"Socialism—communism!" cried Mr. Gus; he was horrified in his simplicity. "Why that's revolution, that's bloodshed and murder!" he cried.

"Oh, no; we're not of the bloody kind—we're not

red," said Fairfax, laughing. "It's the communism that is going to form an ideal society—not fire and flame and barricades."

"You don't mean to tell me," said Gus, not listening to this explanation, "that this young Markham—Paul, this Lady Markham's son—is one of those villains that want to assassinate all the kings, and plunge all Europe into trouble? Good God! what a lucky thing I came here!"

"No, no, I tell you," said Fairfax. "On the contrary, what Paul wants is to turn his back upon kings and aristocracies, to give up civilisation altogether, for that matter, and found a new world in the backwoods. We've all played with the notion. It sounds fine; and then there's one eloquent fellow—a real orator, mind you—who makes it look like the grandest thing in the world to do. I believe he thinks it is, and so does Paul. He's gone wrong in his head on the subject; that is all that is wrong with him. But there is this difference," said Fairfax reflectively, "from going wrong that way and—other ways. If you prove yourself an ass in the common form, you're sorry and ashamed of yourself, and glad to make it up with your people at home; but when it's this sort of thing you stand on your high principles and will not give in. That's one difference between being viewy and—the other. Paul can't make up his mind to give in; and then probably he thinks they are making the very most of his father's illness in order to work upon his feelings. Well! he ought to know better," cried Fairfax, with a flush of indignation; "Lady Markham is not the sort of person to be suspected in that way; but you know the kind of ideas that are general. He makes himself fancy so, I suppose."

"He seems a nice sort of young fellow to come into this fine property," said Gus, with another sidelong, inquisitive look at Fairfax. There was an air of keen curiosity, and at the same time of sarcastic enjoyment, on his face.

"That is the strange thing about it," said Fairfax, reflectively stroking the visionary moustache which very lightly adorned his lip. "Paul is a very queer fellow. He is against the idea of property. He thinks it should all be re-divided and every man have his share. And, what's stranger still," he added, with an exclamation, "he's the fellow to do it if he had the chance. There is nothing sham about him. He would strip himself of everything as easily as I would throw off a coat."

"Against the idea of property!" said little Gus, with a very odd expression. He gave a long whistle of surprise and apparent discomfiture. "He must be a very queer fellow indeed," he said, with an air of something like disappointment. Why should he have been disappointed? But this was what no one, however intimately acquainted with the circumstances, could have told.

"Yes, he is a very queer fellow. He has a great deal in him. One thing that makes me a little uncomfortable," continued Fairfax, unconsciously falling more and more into a confidential tone, "is that I don't know how he may take my being here."

"How should he take it? you are his friend, you said?"

"Ye-es; oh, we've always been very good friends, and one time and another have seen a great deal of each other. Still, you may like a fellow well enough among men, and not care to see him domesticated, you know, in your home. Besides, he might think I had put myself in the way on purpose to curry favour when Sir William was ill—or—I don't know what he might think. It seems shabby somehow to be living with your friend's people when your friend isn't there."

"Especially if he ought to be there, and you are doing his work."

"Perhaps," Fairfax said; and they walked down to the end of the avenue in silence. Mr. Gus had got a

great deal to think of from this interview. A new light had come into his mind—and somehow, strangely, it was not at first an entirely agreeable light. He went along for some way without saying anything, going out of the great gates, and into the high road, which was so quiet. A country cart lumbering past now and then, or a farmer's gig, the sharp trot of a horse carrying a groom from some other great house to inquire after Sir William, gave a little more movement to the rural stillness, increasing the cheerfulness, though the occasion was of the saddest; and as they approached the village, a woman came out from a cottage door, and, making her homely curtsey, asked the same question.

"My lady will be in a sad way," this humble inquirer said. It was of my lady more than of Sir William that the rustic neighbours thought.

"My lady's a great person hereabout," said Mr. Gus, with a look that was half spiteful. "I wonder how she will like it when the property goes away from her. She will not take it so easily as Paul."

"No," said Fairfax, rousing up in defence, "it is not likely she would take it easily; she has all her children to think of. It is to be hoped Paul will have sense enough to provide for the children before he lets it go out of his hands."

"Ah!" This again seemed to be a new light to Gus. "Your Lady Markham would have nothing to say to me," he said, after a pause. "She sent me off fast enough. She neither knows who I am, nor wants to know. Perhaps it would be better both for her and the children if she had been a little more civil."

It was Fairfax's turn to look at him now, which he did with quite a new curiosity. He could not understand in what possible way it might be to Lady Markham's advantage to be civil to the little gentleman whom no one knew anything about; then it occurred to him suddenly that the uncles who appear mysteriously from far countries with heaps of money to bestow, and

who present themselves *incognito* to test their families, are not strictly confined to novels and the stage. Now and then such a thing has happened, or has been said to happen, in real life. Could this be an instance? He was puzzled and he was amused by the idea. Mr. Gus did not look like the possessor of a colossal fortune looking for an heir; nor, though Lady Markham thought him nearly as old-looking as Sir William, did he seem to Fairfax old enough to adopt a simply beneficent rôle. Still, there seemed no other way to account for this half threat. It was all Fairfax could do to restrain his inclination to laugh; but he did so, and exerted himself at once to restore Lady Markham to his companion's good opinion.

"You must remember," he said—"and all we have been saying proves how much both you and I are convinced of it—that Sir William is very ill. His wife's mind is entirely occupied with him, and she is anxious about Paul. Indeed, can any one doubt that she has a great many anxieties very overwhelming to a woman who has been taken care of all her life? Fancy, should anything happen to Sir William, what a charge upon her shoulders! The wonder to me is that she can see any one; indeed she does not see any one. And if she does not know, as you say, who you are——"

"No," said Mr. Gus. Something which sounded half like a chuckle of satisfaction, and half a note of offence, was in his voice. He was like a mischievous school-boy delighted with the effect of a mystification, yet at the same time angry that he had not been found out. "She knows nothing about me," he said, with a half-laugh. Just then they had reached the Markham Arms, into which Fairfax followed him without thinking. They went into the little parlour, which was somewhat gloomy on this dull day, and green with the shadow of the honeysuckle which hung so delightfully over the window when the sun was shining, but darkened the room now with its wreaths of obtrusive foliage, glistening in the

soft summer drizzle. "Come in, come in," said Mr. Gus, pushing the chair, which was miscalled easy, towards his visitor, and shivering slightly; "nobody knows anything about me here: and if this is what you call summer, I wish I had never left Barbados. I can tell you, Mr. Fairfax, it was not a reception like this I looked for when I came here."

"Probably," said Fairfax, hitting the mark at a venture, "it is only Sir William himself who is acquainted with all the family relations—and as he is ill and disabled, of course he does not even know that you are here."

"He does know that I am here," cried the little gentleman, bursting with his grievance. It had come to that pitch that he could not keep silence any longer, and shut this all up in his own breast. "I wrote to let him know I had come. I should think he did know about his relations; and I—I can tell you, I'm a much nearer relation than any one here is aware."

Fairfax received this intimation quite calmly; he was not excited. Indeed it did not convey to him any kind of emotion. What did the matter? Uncle or distant cousin, it was of very little consequence. He said, placidly—

"The village looks very pretty from this window. Are you comfortable here?"

"Comfortable!" echoed Gus. "Do you think I came all this way across the sea to shut myself up in a village public-house? I didn't even know what a village public-house was. I knew that house up there, and had known it all my life. I've got a drawing of it I'll show you, as like as anything ever was. Do you suppose I thought I would ever be sent away from there? I—oh, but you don't know, you can't suppose, how near a relation I am."

Fairfax thought the little man must be a monomaniac on this subject of his relationship to the Markhams. He thought it was but another instance of the wonderful

way in which people worship family and descent. He himself having none of these things had marked often, with the keenness of a man who is beyond the temptation, the exaggerated importance which most people gave to them. Sir William Markham, it might be said, was a man whom it was worth while to be related to; but it did not matter what poor bit of a squire it was, Fairfax thought; a man who could boast himself the cousin of Hodge of Claypits was socially a better man than the best man who was related to nobody. What a strange thing this kind of test was! To belong to a famous historical family, or to be connected with people of eminent acquirements, he could understand that there might be a pride in that; but the poorest little common-place family that had vegetated at one place for a century or two! He did not make any answer to Mr. Gus, but smiled at him, and yet compassionated him—this poor little fellow who had come over here from the tropics with his head full of the glory of the Markhams, and now had nothing better to do than to sit in this little inn parlour and brag of his relationship to them; it was very pitiful, and yet it was ludicrous too.

"I wonder," he said suddenly, "whether they could put me up here? I want to go, and yet I don't want to be away, if you can understand that. If anything were to happen, and Markham not here——"

"I should be here," said Gus. "I tell you you haven't the least idea how near a relation I am. Lady Markham may be as high and mighty as she likes, but it would be better for her if she were a little civil. She doesn't know the power that a man may have whom she chooses to slight. And I can tell you my papers are all in order. There are no registers wanting or certificates, or anything to be put a question upon; uncle took care of that. Though he adopted me, and had the intention of making me his heir (if he had left anything to be heir to), he always took the greatest care of all my papers. And he used to say to me,

'Look here, Gus, if anything should happen to me, here's what will set you up, my boy.' I never thought much about it so long as he was living, I thought things were going better than they were; and when the smash came I took a little time to pick myself up. Then I thought I'd do what he always advised—I'd come home. But if any one had told me I was to be living here, in a bit of a tavern, and nobody knowing who I am, I should not have believed a word."

"It is very unfortunate," said Fairfax; "but of course it is because of Sir William's illness—that could not have been foreseen."

"No, to be sure it could not have been foreseen," Gus said; then roused himself again in the might of his injury. "But if you could guess, if you could so much as imagine, who I really am——"

Fairfax looked at him with curiosity. It was strange to see the vehemence in his face: but Gus was now carried beyond self-control. He could not help letting himself out, getting the relief of disclosure. He leant across the little shining mahogany table and whispered a few words into Fairfax's ear.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"WHAT does the doctor say?"

"Oh, Mr. Fairfax! worse, far worse than nothing! He looks at us as if his heart would break. He has known us all our lives. He steals out through the garden not to see me. But I know what he means, I know very well what he means," Alice said with irrestrainable tears.

"But the other one from London—Sir Thomas: he is coming?"

"This afternoon: but it will not do any good. Mr.

Fairfax, will you telegraph once more to Paul? I don't think he believes us. Tell him that papa——"

"Don't say any more, Miss Markham; I understand. But one moment," said Fairfax; "Paul will not like to find me here. No, there is no reason why—we have never quarrelled. But he will not like to find me here."

"You have been very kind, very good to us, Mr. Fairfax; you have stayed and helped us when there was no one else; you have always been a—comfort. But then it must have been very, very dismal and gloomy for you to be in a house where there was nothing but trouble," Alice said.

Her pretty eyes were swimming in tears. It gave her a little pang to think that perhaps this visitor, though he had been so kind, had been staying out of mere civility, and thinking it hard. It was not out of any other feeling in her mind that she was aware of; but to think that Fairfax had been longing to get away perhaps, feeling the tedium of his stay, gave her a sharp little shock of pain.

"Do not speak so—pray do not speak so," said Fairfax, distressed. "That is not the reason. But I think I will go to the village. There I can be at hand whatever is wanted. You will know that I am ready by night or day—but I have no right to be here."

Alice looked at him, scarcely seeing him through the great tears with which her eyes were brimming over. She put out her hand with a tremulous gesture of appeal.

"Then you think," she said, in a voice which was scarcely louder than a whisper, "you think—it is very near?"

Fairfax felt that he could not explain himself. In the very presence of death could any one pause to think that Paul might find a visitor intrusive, or that the visitor himself might be conscious of a false position?

"No," he said, "no: how can I tell? I have not seen him. I could not be a judge. It is on Paul's account; but I shall be at the village—always at hand whatever you may want."

This reassured her a little, and the glimmer of a feeble smile came on her face. She gave him her trembling hand for a moment. He had been very "kind." It was not a word that expressed his devotion, but Alice did not know what other to use: very—very kind.

"The house will seem more empty still if you go. It looks so lonely," said Alice; "like what it used to be when they were away in town and we left behind. Oh, if that were all! Paul ought to have been here all the time, and you have taken his place. It is unjust that you should go when he comes."

"I shall not go," said Fairfax softly. He had held her hand in his for a moment—only for a moment. Alice, in her grief, was soothed by his sympathy; but Fairfax, on the other hand, was very well aware that he must take no advantage of that sympathy. He would have liked to kiss the trembling hand in an effusion of tender pity, and if it had been Lady Markham he might have done so; but it was Alice, and he dared not. He held himself aloof by main strength, keeping himself from even a word more. There was almost a little chill in it to the girl, whose heart was full of trouble and pain, and whose tearful eyes appealed unconsciously to that "kindness" in which she had such confidence. To be deserted by any one at such a moment would have seemed hard to her. The house was oppressed by the slow rolling-up of this cloud, which was about to overcloud all their life.

Lady Markham now scarcely left the sick-room at all. When they warned her that she would exhaust herself, that she would not be able to bear the strain, she would shake her head with a woeful sort of smile. She was not of the kind that breaks down. She was sure of

herself so long as she should be wanted, and afterwards, what did it matter? Now and then she would come out and take a turn or two along the corridor, rather because of the restlessness of anguish that would take possession of her than from any desire to "change the air," as the nurse said. And when she was out of the room Sir William's worn eyes would watch the door. "Don't leave me alone," he said to her in his feeble voice. He had grown very feeble now. For by far the greater part of the time he was occupied entirely with his bodily sufferings; but now and then it would occur to him that there was something in his pocket-book, something that would give a great deal of trouble—and that there was somebody who wanted to see him and to force an explanation. How was he able, in his weak state, to give any explanation? He had entreated his wife at first not to allow him to be disturbed, and now as everything grew dimmer, he could not bear that she should leave him. There was protection in her presence. At times it occurred to him that his enemy was lurking outside, and that all his attendants could do was to keep the intruder at bay. Now and then he would hear a step in the corridor, which no doubt was his; but the nurses were all faithful, and the dangerous visitor was never let in. At these moments Sir William turned his feeble head to look for his wife. She would protect him. As he went further and further, deeper and deeper, into the valley of the shadow, he forgot even what the danger was; but the idea haunted him still. All this time he had never asked for Paul. He had not wished to see any one, only to have his room well watched and guarded, and nobody allowed to disturb him. When the doctors came there was always a thrill of alarm in his mind—not for his own condition, as might have been supposed, but lest in their train or under some disguise the man who was his enemy might get admission. And thus, without any alarm in respect to himself, without any personal uneasiness about what

was coming, he descended gradually the fatal slope. The thought of death never occurred to him at all. No solemn alarm was his, not even any consciousness of what might be coming. He never breathed a word as to what he wished to be done, or gave any directions. In short, he did not apparently think much of his illness. The idea of a dangerous and disagreeable visitor who would go away again if no notice was taken of him, and of whom it was expedient to take no notice, was the master idea in his mind, and with all the strength he had he kept this danger secret—it was all the exertion of which he was now capable.

And to be a visitor in the house at such a melancholy moment was most embarrassing. There are some people who have a special knack of mixing themselves up in the affairs of others, and Fairfax was one of these. He was himself strangely isolated and alone in the world, and it seemed to him that he had never found so much interest in anything as in this family story into the midst of which he had been so suddenly thrown. Almost before he had become acquainted with them, circumstances had made him useful, and for the moment necessary, to them. He was an intruder, yet he was doing the work of a son. And then in those long summer evenings which Lady Markham spent in her husband's sickroom, what a strange charmed life the young man had drifted into! When the children went to bed, Alice would leave the great drawing-room blazing with lights, for that smaller room at the end which was Lady Markham's sanctuary, and which was scarcely lighted at all, and there the two young people would sit alone, waiting for Lady Markham's appearance or for news from the sick-room, with only one dim lamp burning, and the summer moonlight coming in through the little golden-tinted panes of the great Elizabethan window. Sometimes they scarcely said anything to each other, the anxiety which was the very atmosphere of the house hushing them into watchful-

ness and listening which forbade speech ; but sometimes, on the other hand, they would talk in half-whispers, making to each other without knowing it, many disclosures both of their young lives and characters, which advanced them altogether beyond that knowledge of each other which ordinary acquaintances possess.

Nothing like love, it need not be said, was in those bits of intercourse, broken sometimes by a hasty summons from the sick-room to Alice, or a hurried commission to Fairfax—a telegram that had to be answered, or something that it was necessary to explain to the doctor. In the intervals of these duties, which seemed as natural to the one as to the other, the girl and the young man would talk or would be silent, somehow pleased and soothed mutually by each other's presence, though neither was conscious of thinking of the other. Alice at least was not conscious. She felt that it was "a comfort" that he should be there, so sympathetic, so kind, ready to go anywhere at a moment's notice ; and she had come to be able to say to him "Go" or "Come" without hesitation, and to take for granted his willing service. But it was scarcely to be expected that Fairfax should be unconscious of the strangeness of the union which was invisibly forming itself between them. At first a certain amusement had mixed with the natural surprise of suddenly finding himself in circumstances so strange ; but it must be allowed that by degrees Fairfax came to think Sir William's illness a fortunate chance, and so long as imminent danger was not thought of, had no objection to its continuance.

But things had become more grave from day to day. Sir William, without doubt, seemed going to die, and Paul did not come, and the stranger's services became more and more necessary, yet more and more incongruous with the circumstances of the house. The whole came to a climax when Gus whispered that revelation across the table in the inn parlour. The excitement

and distress with which Fairfax received it is not to be described. Could it be true? Certainly Gus was absolutely convinced of its truth, and unaware of any possibility of denial. Fairfax asked himself, with a perplexity more serious than he had ever known in his life before, what he ought to do. Was it his duty to say something or to say nothing? to warn them of the extraordinary blow that was coming, or to hold his peace and merely look on? When he went back up the peaceful avenue into the house which he was beginning to call home—the house over which one dread cloud was hanging, but which had no prevision of the other calamity—he felt as if he himself were a traitor conniving at its destruction. But to whom could he speak? Not to Lady Markham who had so much to bear—and Alice—to tell such a tale to Alice was impossible. It was then that he determined at any cost that Paul must come, and he himself go away. That Paul would not tolerate his presence in the house he was aware, instinctively feeling that neither could he, in Paul's place, have borne it. And to go away was not so easy as it once might have been; but there seemed no longer any question what his duty was. He put up some of his things in a bag, and himself carried them with him down the avenue, not able to feel otherwise than sadly heavy and sore about the heart. He could not abandon the ladies; but he could not stay there any longer with that secret in his possession. His telegram to Paul was in a different tone from those which the ladies sent.

"The doctors give scarcely any hope," he said. "Come instantly. I cannot but feel myself an intruder at such a moment; but I will not leave till you come."

Then he went sadly with his bag to the Markham Arms. Was it right? Was it wrong? It even glanced across his mind that to establish himself there by the side of Gus might seem to the Markhams like taking their enemy's side against them. But what else could

he do? He would neither intrude upon them nor abandon them.

Fairfax calculated justly. Paul, who had resisted his mother's appeals and his sister's entreaties, obeyed at once the imperative message of the man who threw the light of outside opinion and common necessity upon the situation. He arrived that night, just after the great London physician, who had come down to pronounce upon Sir William's condition, had been driven to the railway. Paul had no carriage sent for him, and had said to himself that it was all an exaggeration and piece of folly, since some one from Markham was evidently dining out. There were, however, all the signs of melancholy excitement which usually follow such a visit visible in the hall and about the house when he reached it. Brown and one of his subordinates were standing talking in low tones on the great steps, shaking their heads as they conversed. Mr. Brown himself had managed to change his usually cheerful countenance into the semblance of that which is characteristic of an undertaker's mute.

"I knew how it would be the moment I set eyes upon him," Mr. Brown was saying. "Death was in his face, if it ever was in a man's."

Paul sprang from the lumbering old fly which he had found at the station with a mixture of eagerness and incredulity.

"How is my father?" he said.

"Oh, sir, you're come none too soon," said Brown, "Sir William is as bad as bad can be." And then Alice, hearing something, she did not know what, rushed out. Every sound was full of terror in the oppressed house. She flung herself upon her brother and wept. There was no need to say anything; and Paul who had been lingering, thinking they did not mean what they said, believing it to be a device to get him seduced into that dangerous stronghold of his enemy's house, was overcome too,

"Why did not I hear before?" he said. But nobody bid him remember that he had been told a dozen times before.

Sir William was very ill that night. He began to wander, and said things in his confused and broken utterance which were very mysterious to the listeners. But as none of them had any clue to what these wanderings meant, they did not add, as they might have done, to the misery of the night. There was no rest for any one during those tedious hours. The children and the inferior servants went to bed as usual, but the elder ones, and those domestics who had been long in the family, could not rest any more than could those individually concerned; the excitement of that gloomy expectation got into their veins. Mrs. Fry was up and down all night, and Brown lay on a sofa in the housekeeper's room, from which he appeared at intervals looking very wretched and troubled, with that air of half-fearing half hoping the worst, which gets into the faces of those who stand about the outer chamber where death has shown his face. Nothing however "happened" that night. The day began again, and life, galvanised into a haggard copy of itself, with all the meals put upon the table as usual. The chief figure in this new day, in this renewed vigil, was Paul, who, always important in the house, was now doubly important as so soon to be master of all. The servants were all very careful of him that he should not be troubled; messages and commissions which the day before would have been handed uncereemoniously to Fairfax, were now managed by Brown himself as best he could rather than trouble Mr. Paul; and even Mrs. Fry was more anxious that he should lie down and rest, than even that Alice, her favourite, should be spared.

"It will all come upon him *after*," the housekeeper said.

As for Paul himself, the effect upon him was very great. Perhaps it was because of the profound dissatis-

faction in his mind with all his own plans, that he had so long resisted the call to come home. Since his father had left Oxford, Paul had gone through many chapters of experience. Every day had made him more discontented with his future associates, more secretly appalled by the idea that the rest of his life was to be spent entirely among them. He had left his rooms in college, and gone into some very homely ones not far from Spears's, by way of accustoming himself to his new life. This was a thing he had long intended to do, and he had been angry with himself for his weak-minded regard for personal comfort, but unfortunately his enthusiasm had begun to sink into disgust before he took this step, and his loathing for the little mean rooms, the narrow street full of crowding children and evil odours was intense. That he had forced himself to remain, notwithstanding this loathing, was perhaps all the worse for his plans. He would not yield to his own disgust, but it inspired him with a secret horror and opposition far more important than this mere dislike of his surroundings. He saw that none of the others minded those things, which made his existence miserable. Even Spears, whose perceptions in some respects were delicate, did not smell the smell, nor perceive the squalor. He thought Paul's new lodgings very handsome; he called him Paul, without any longer even the apologetic smile which at first accompanied that familiarity, as a matter of course. And Janet gave him no peace. She called him out with little beckonings and signs. She was always in the way when he came or went. She took the charge of him, telling him what he ought to do and what not to do, with an attempt at that petty tyranny which a woman who is loved may exercise with impunity, but which becomes intolerable in any other.

It was thus with a kind of fierce determination to remain faithful to his convictions that Paul had set himself like a rock against all the appeals from home. His convictions! These convictions gradually resolved

themselves into a conviction of the utter unendurableness of life, under the conditions which he had chosen, as day by day went on. Nothing, he had resolved, should make him yield, or own himself mistaken—nothing would induce him to give up the cause to which he had pledged himself. But now that at last he had been driven out of that stronghold, and forced to leave the surroundings he hated, and come back to those that were natural to him, Paul's mind was in a chaos indescribable. After the first burst of penitence and remorse, there had stolen on him a sense of well-being, a charm of association which he strove to struggle against, but in vain. He was grieved, deeply grieved for his father; but is it possible that in the mind of a young heir, aware of all the incalculable differences in his own life which the end of his father's must make, there should not be a quivering excitement of the future mingling with the sorrow of the present, however sincere? When he went out in the morning, after the feverishness of that agitated night, to feel the fresh air in his face, and saw around him all the spreading woods, all the wealthy and noble grace of the old house which an hour or moment, might make his own, a strange convulsion shook his being. Was not he pledged to give all up, to relinquish everything—to share whatever he had with his brother, and, leave all belonging to him? The question brought a deadly faintness over him. While he stood under the trees looking at his home, he seemed to see the keen eyes of the Scotsman, Fraser, inspecting the place, and Short jotting down calculations on a bit of paper as to what would be the value of the materials, and how many villas semi-detached might be built on the site—while Spears, perhaps, patted him on the shoulder, and bid him remember that even if he had not given it up, this could not have lasted,—“the country would not stand it long.” He seemed to see and hear them discussing his fate; and Janet, standing at the door, making signs to him with her hand. What had he to

do here? It was to that society he belonged. Nevertheless, Paul's heart quivered with a strange excitement when he thought that to-morrow—perhaps this very night!—And then he bethought himself of the darkened room upstairs, and his mother's lingering watch; and his heart contracted with a sudden pang.

Next evening it was apparent that the end was at hand. Just as the sun went down, when the soft greyness of the summer twilight began to steal into the air, the children were sent for into Sir William's room. They thronged in with pale faces and wide open eyes, having been bidden not to cry—not to disturb the quiet of the death chamber. The windows were all open, the sky appearing in wistful stretches of clearness; but near the bed, in the shadow, a shaded lamp burned solemnly, and the window beyond showed gleams of lurid colour in the western sky, barred by strong black lines of cloud. These black lines of cloud, and the mysterious shining of the lamp, gave a strange air of solemnity to the room, all filled already by the awe and wonder of death. A sob of mingled grief and terror burst from little Marie, as grasping her sister's hand convulsively, she followed Alice to her father's bedside. Was it he that lay there, propped up with cushions, breathing so hard and painfully? The boys stood at the foot of the bed. Their hearts were full of that dreary anguish of the unaccustomed and unknown, which gives additional depth to every sorrow of early youth. Alice, who had taken her place close to the head of the bed had lost this. She knew all about it, poor child—what to do for him; what was coming; all that should be administered to him. She was as pale as those pale stretches of sky, and like them in the clear pathetic wistfulness of her face; but she had something to do, and she was not afraid.

"William—are you able to say anything to the children?" said Lady Markham. "They have all come—to see you—to ask how you are——" She could not

say, "to bid you farewell;" that was not possible. Her voice was quite steady and calm. The time was coming when she would be able to weep, but not now.

He opened his eyes and looked at them with a faint smile. He had always been good to the children. At his most busy moment they had never been afraid of him. Little Bell held her breath, opening her eyes wider and wider to keep down that passion of tears which was coming, while Marie clung to her, trying to imitate her, but with the tears already come, and making blinding reflections of the solemn lamp and the evening light.

"Ah, yes, the children," Sir William said. "I have not seen them since Sunday. They have been very good—and kind; they have not—made any noise. Who is that? I thought—I heard—some one—"

"Nobody, papa," said Alice—"nobody—except all of us."

"Ah! all of you," he said, and gave one of those panting, hard-drawn breaths which were so terrible to hear.

The door was open, like the windows, to give all the air possible. The servants were standing about the stairs and in the passages. Everybody knew that the last act was about to be performed solemnly, and the master of the house on the eve of his going away. Most of the women were crying. Even when it is nothing to you, what event is there that can be so much as this final going—this departure into the unseen? There was a general hush of awe and excitement. And how it was that amidst them all that stranger managed to get entrance, to walk up stairs, to thread through the mournful group, no one ever knew. His step was audible, even among that agitated company, as he came along the corridor. They all heard it, with a certain sense of alarm. Was it the doctor coming back again with something new he had thought of, or was it—

"Ah, all of you," Sir William said; and as he spoke the words the new-comer came in at the door. He walked up to the foot of the bed, no one molesting him. They were all struck dumb with surprise; and what could they have done, when a momentary tumult or scuffle would have killed the sufferer at once? For the moment every eye was turned from Sir William, and directed to Mr. Gus in his light clothes, with his little brown face, so distinct from all the others. He came up close to the foot of the bed.

"Yes, all of us, now I am here," he said. "I am sorry to disturb you at such a time; but, Sir William Markham, you'll have to own me before you die."

Paul made a hasty step towards him, and put a hand upon his shoulder.

"Don't you see," he said. "Go away, for God's sake. Whatever you want I'll attend to you after."

"I'll not go away," said Gus. "I must stand for my rights, even if he is dying. Sir William Markham, it's your own doing. I have given you warning. You'll have to own me before you die."

Paul, beside himself, seized the stranger by the shoulders; but Gus, though he was small, was strong.

"Don't make a scuffle," he said in a low tone; "I won't go, but I'll make no disturbance. He's going to speak. Be still, you, and listen to what he says."

Sir William signed impatiently to his attendants on each side—Alice and her mother—to raise him. He looked round him, feebly peering into the waning light.

"They are beginning to fight—over my bed," he said, with a quiver in his voice.

"No," said Gus, getting free from Paul's restraining grasp. He made no noise, but he was supple and strong, and slid out of the other's hands. "No, there shall be no fighting; I have more respect—but own me, father, before you die. I'll take care of them. I'll do no one any harm, I swear before God; but own me before you die."

They all stood and listened, gazing, forgetting even the man who was dying. The very children forgot him, and turned to the well-known countenance of the little gentleman. Then there came a gasp, a sob, a great quiver in the bed. Sir William flung out his emaciated arms with a gesture of despair.

"I said I was not to be disturbed," he said, and fell back, never to be disturbed any more.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE news of Sir William Markham's death made a great sensation in the neighbourhood. It was as if a great house had fallen to the ground, a great tree been riven up by the roots. There are some people whom no one expects ever to die, and he was one of them. There seemed so much for him to do in the world. He was so full of occupation, so well qualified to do it, so precise and orderly in all his ways, every moment of his time filled up, he did not seem to have leisure for all the troublesome preliminaries of dying. But as it happened, he had found the time for them, as we all do, and everybody was astonished. It was whispered in the county that there had been "a very strange scene at the death-bed," and everybody concluded that this was somehow connected with the heir, it being well known that Paul had only appeared the day before his father's death. Some vague rumours on this score flew about in the days which elapsed before the funeral, but nobody could tell the rights of the story, and it had already begun to fade before the great pomp and ceremonial of the funeral day. This was to be a very great day at Markham Royal. In the Markham Arms all the stables were getting cleared out, in preparation for the horses of the gentry who would collect from far and near to pay

honour to the last scene in which the member for the county would ever play any part; and all the village was roused in expectation. No doubt it was a very solemn and sad ceremonial, and Markham Royal knew that it had lost its best friend; but, notwithstanding, any kind of excitement is pleasant in the country, and they liked this well enough in default of better. The little gentleman too, who was living at the Markham Arms, was a great diversion to the village. He gave himself the air of superintending everything that was done at the Markham burying place. He went about it solemnly—as if it could by any possibility be his business—and he put on all the semblance of one who has lost a near relation. He put away his light clothes, and appeared in black, with a hat-band which almost covered his tall hat. The village people felt it very natural that the little gentleman should be proud of his relationship to the Markhams, and should take such a good opportunity of showing it; but those who knew about such matters laughed a little at the size of his hatband. "If he had been a son it could not have been larger. Sir Paul himself could not do more," Mr. Remnant, the draper, said.

It happened that Dolly Stainforth was early astir on the funeral morning. She thought it right to get all her parish work over at an early hour, for the village would be full of "company," and indeed Dolly was aware that even in the rectory itself there would be a great many people to luncheon, and that her father's stables would be as full of horses as those of the Markham Arms. She was full of excitement and grief herself, partly for Sir William whom she had known all her life, but still more for Alice and Lady Markham, for whom the girl grieved as if their grief had been her own. She had put on a black frock to be so far in sympathy with her friends, and before the dew was off the flowers, had gathered all she could find in the rectory garden, and made them into wreaths and crosses. This is an

occupation which soothes the sympathetic mourner. She stood under the shadow of a little *bosquet* on the slope of the rectory garden which looked towards the churchyard, and worked silently at this labour of love, a tear now and then falling upon the roses still wet with morning dew. From where she stood she could see the preparations in the great Markham burying place, the sexton superintending the place prepared in which Sir William was to lie with his father, the lych-gate under which the procession would pause as they entered, and the path by which they would sweep round to the church. That which was about to happen so soon seemed already to be happening before her eyes. The tears streamed down Dolly's fresh morning cheeks. To die, to be put away under the cold turf, to leave the warm precincts of the cheerful day, seems terrible indeed to a creature so young as she was, so full of life, and on a summer morning all brimming over with melody and beauty. When she shook the tears off her eyelashes she saw a solitary figure coming through the churchyard, pausing for a moment to look at the grave, then turning towards the gate which led into the rectory garden. Dolly put the wreath she was making on her arm, and hastened to meet him. Her heart beat; it was full of sorrow and pity, and yet of excitement too. She went to him with the tears once more streaming from her pretty eyes. "Oh Paul!" she said, putting her hand into his, and able to say no more. Of late she had begun to call him Mr. Markham, feeling shy of her old playfellow and of herself, but she could not stand upon her dignity now. She would have liked to throw her arms round his neck, to console him, to have called him dear Paul. In his trouble it seemed impossible to do too much for him. And Paul on his side took the little hand in both his, and held it fast. The tears rose to his eyes too. He was very grown up, very tall and solemn, and his mind was full of many a serious thought—but when he had little Dolly by the hand the

softest influence of which he was susceptible came over him. "Thank you, Dolly," he said, with quivering lips.

"How are they?" said the little girl, coming very close to his side, and looking up at him with her wet eyes.

"Oh, how can they be?" said Paul; "my mother is worn out, she cannot feel it yet: and Alice is with her night and day."

"Will they come?" said Dolly, with a sob in her voice.

"I fear so; it is too much for them. But I am afraid they will come, whatever I may say."

"Oh, don't you think it is best? Then they will feel that they have not left him, not for a moment, nor failed him, as long as there was anything to do."

"But that makes it all the worse when there is nothing to do. I fear for my mother."

"She has got you, Paul—and the children."

"Yes, me; and I did not come till the last. Did you hear that, Dolly?—that I wasted all the time when he was dying, and was only here the last day?"

"Dear Paul," said Dolly, giving him her hand again, "you did not mean it. Do you think he does not know now? Oh, you may be sure he understands!" she cried, with that confidence in the advancement of the dead above all petty frailties which is so touching and so universal.

"I hope so," Paul said, with quivering lips; and as he stood here, with this soft hand clasping his, and this familiar, almost childish, voice consoling him, Paul felt as if he had awakened out of a dream. This was the place he belonged to, not the squalid dream to which he had given himself. Standing under those beautiful trees, with this soft, fair innocent creature comprehending and consoling him, there suddenly flashed before his eyes a vision of a narrow street, the lamp-post, the children shouting and fighting, and another creature,

who did not at all understand him, standing close by him, pressing her advice upon him, looking up at him with eager eyes. A sudden horror seized him even while he felt the softness of Dolly's consoling touch and voice. It quickened the beating of his heart and brought a faintness of terror like a film over his eyes.

"Come and sit down," said Dolly, alarmed. "You are so pale. Oh, Paul, sit down, and I will run and bring you something. You have been shutting yourself up too much; you have been making yourself ill. Oh, Paul! you must not reproach yourself. You must remember how much there is to do."

"Do not leave me, Dolly. I am going to speak to the rector. I am not ill—it was only a sudden recollection that came over me. I have not been so good a son as I ought to have been."

"Oh, Paul! he sees now—he sees that you never meant it," Dolly said. "Do you think *they* are like us, thinking only of the outside? And you have your mother to think of now."

"And so I will," he said, with a softening rush of tears to his eyes. "Come in with me, Dolly."

Dolly was used to comforting people who were in trouble. She did not take away her hand, but went in with him very quietly, like a child, leading the young man who was so deeply moved. Her own heart was in a great flutter and commotion, but she kept very still, and led him to her father's study and opened the door for him. "Here is Paul, papa," she said, as if Paul had been a boy again, coming with an exercise, or to be scolded for some folly he had done. But afterwards Dolly went back to her wreaths with her heart beating very wildly. She was ashamed and angry with herself that it should be so on such a day—the morning of the funeral. But then it is so in nature, let us chide as we will. One day ends weeping, and the next thrusts its recollection away with sunshine. Already the new

springs of life were beginning to burst forth from the very edges of the grave.

When Paul went away after this last bit of melancholy business (he had come to tell the rector what the hymn was which his mother wished to be sung) he did not see Dolly again. She was putting all her flowers ready with which to cover the darkness of the coffin—a tender expedient which has everywhere suggested itself to humanity. He went away through the early sunshine, walking with a subdued and measured tread as a man enters a church not to disturb the worshippers. In Paul's own mind there was a feeling like that of convalescence—the sense of something painful behind yet hopeful before—the faintness and weakness, yet renewal of life, which comes after an illness. There was no anguish in his grief, nor had there been after the first agony of self-reproach which he had experienced, when he perceived the cruelty of his lingering and reluctance to obey his mother's call. But that was over. He had at least done his duty at the last, and now the feeling in Paul's mind was more that of respectful compassion for his father now withdrawn out of all the happiness of his life, than of any sorer, more personal sentiment. The loss of him was not a thing against which his son's whole soul cried out as darkening heaven and earth to himself. The loss of a child has this effect upon a parent, but that of a parent seldom so affects a child; yet he was sorry, with almost a compunctious sense of the happiness of living, for his father who had lost that—who had been obliged to give up wife and children, and his happy domestic life, and his property and influence, and the beautiful world and the daylight. At this thought his heart bled for Sir William; yet for himself beat softly with a sense of unbounded opening and expansion and new possibility. As he walked softly home, his step instinctively so sobered and gentle, his demeanour so subdued, the thoughts that possessed him were such as he had never experienced before.

They possessed him indeed; they were not voluntary, not originated by any will of his, but swept through him as on the wings of the wind, or gently floated into him, filling every nook and corner. He was no longer the same being; the moody, viewy, rebellious young man who was about to emigrate with Spears, to join a little rude community of colonists and work with his hands for his daily bread and sacrifice all his better knowledge, all the culture of a higher social caste, to rough equality and primitive justice—had died with Sir William. All that seemed to be years behind him. Sometimes his late associates appeared to him as if in a dream, as the discomforts of a past journey or the perils that we have overcome, flash upon us in sudden pictures. He saw Spears and Fraser and the rest for a moment gleaming out of the darkness, as he might have seen a precipice in the Alps on the edge of which for a moment he had hung. It was not that he had given them up; it was that in a moment they had become impossible. He walked on, subdued, in his strange convalescence, with a kind of content and resignation and sense of submission. A man newly out of a fever, submits sweetly to all the immediate restraints that suit his weakness. He does not insist upon exercises or indulgences of which he feels incapable, but recognises with a grateful sense of trouble over, the duty of submitting. This was how Paul felt. He was not glad, but there was in his veins a curious elation, expansion, a rising tide of new life. He had to cross the village street on his way home, and there all the people he met took off their hats or made their curtsies with a reverential respect that arose half out of respect for his new dignities, and half out of sympathy for the son who had lost his father. Just when his mind was soft and tender with the sight of this universal homage, there came up to him a strange little figure, all in solemn black.

"You are going home," said this unknown being.

"I will walk with you and talk it over; and let us try if we cannot arrive at an understanding——"

Paul put up his hand with sudden impatience. "I can't speak to you to-day," he said hastily.

"Not to-day? the day of our father's funeral; that ought to be the most suitable day of all—and indeed it must be," the little gentleman said.

"Mr. Gaveston," said Paul, "if that is your name——"

"No, it is not my name," said Mr. Gus.

"I suppose you lay claim to ours, then? You have no right. But Mr. Markham Gaveston, or whatever you call yourself, you ought to see that this is not the moment. I will not refuse to examine your claims at a more appropriate time," said Paul with lofty distance.

A slight redness came over Gus's brown face. He laughed angrily. "Yes, you will have to consider my claims," he said. And then after a little hesitation, he went away. This disturbed the current of Paul's languid, yet intense, consciousness. He felt a horror of the man who had thus, he thought, intruded the recollection of his father's early errors to cloud the perfect honour and regret with which he was to be carried to his grave. The interruption hurt and wounded him. Of course the fellow would have to be silenced—bought off at almost any price—rather than communicate to the world this stigma upon the dead. By and by, however, as he went on, the harshness of this jarring note floated away in the intense calm and peace of the sweet atmosphere of the morning which surrounded him. The country was more hushed than usual, as if in sympathy with what was to happen to-day. The very birds stirred softly among the trees, giving place, it might have been supposed, to that plaintive coo of the wood pigeon "moaning for its mate" which is the very voice of the woods. A soft awe seemed over all the earth—an awe that to the young man seemed to concern as much his own life which was, as the other which was ending.

The same awe crept into his own heart as he went towards his home, that temple of grief and mourning from which all the sunshine was shut out. There seemed to rise up within him a sudden sense of the responsibilities of the future, a sudden warmth of resolution which brought the tears to his eyes.

"I will be good," said the little princess, when she heard of the great kingdom that was coming to her; and Paul, though he was not a child to use that simple phraseology, felt the same. The follies of the past were all departed like clouds. He was the head of the family—the universal guardian. It lay with him to see that all were cared for, all kept from evil; the fortune of many was in his hands; power had come to him—real power, not visionary uncertain influence such as he had once thought the highest of possibilities. "I will be good"—this thought swelled up within him, filling his heart.

It was past mid-day when the procession set out; the whole county had come from all its corners, to do honour to Sir William, and the parish sent forth a humble audience, scattered along all the roads, half-sad, half-amused by the sight of all the carriages and the company. When they caught a glimpse of my lady in her deep crape, the women cried: but dried their tears to count the number of those who followed, and felt a vague gratification in the honour done to the family. All the men who were employed on the estate, and the farmers, and even many people from Farboro', the market-town, swelled the procession. Such a great funeral had never been seen in the district. Lady Westland and her daughter, and Mrs. Booth, and the other ladies in the parish, assembled under the rectory trees, and watched the wonderful procession, not without much remark on the fact that Dolly had gone to the grave with the family, a thing which no one else had been asked to do. It was not the ladies on the lawn, however, who remarked the strange occurrence which surprised the

lookers-on below, and which was so soon made comprehensible by what followed. When the procession left the church-door, the stranger who was living at the Markham Arms appeared all of a sudden, in the old-fashioned scarves and hat-bands of the deepest conventional woe, and placed himself behind the coffin, in a line with, or indeed a little in advance of, Paul. There was a great flutter among the professional conductors of the ceremony when this was observed. One of the attendants rushed to him, and took him by the arm, and remonstrated with anxious whispers.

"You can follow behind, my good gentleman—you can follow behind," the undertaker said; "but this is the chief mourner's place."

"It is my place," said the intruder aloud, "and I mean to keep it."

"Oh, don't you now, sir—don't you now make a business," cried the distressed official. "Keep out of Sir Paul's way!"

The stranger shook the man off with a sardonic grin which almost sent him into a fit, so appalling was it, and contrary to all the decorum of the occasion. And what more could any one do? They kept him out of the line of the procession, but they could not prevent him from keeping up with, keeping close by Paul's side. Indeed Mr. Gus got close to the side of the grave, and made the responses louder than any one else, as if he were indeed the chief actor in the scene. And his appearance in all those trappings of woe, which no one else wore, pointed him doubly out to public notice. Indeed the undertaker approved of him for that; it was showing a right feeling—even though it was not from himself that Mr. Gus had procured that livery of mourning. It was he that lingered the longest when the mourners dispersed. This incident was very much discussed and talked of in the parish and among the gentlemen who had attended the funeral, during the rest of the day. But the wonder which it excited was

light and trivial indeed in comparison with the wonders that were soon to follow. All day long the roads were almost gay (if it had not been wrong to use such an expression in the circumstances) with the carriages returning from the funeral, and the people in the roadside cottages felt themselves at liberty to enjoy the sight of them now that all was over, and Sir William safely laid in his last bed.

"And here's Sir Paul's 'ealth," was a toast that was many times repeated in the Markham Arms, and in all the little alehouses where the thirsty mourners refreshed themselves during the day; "and if he's as good a landlord and as good a master as his father, there won't be much to say again' him."

There were many, however, who, remembering all that had been said about him, the "bad company" he kept, and his long absences from home, shook their heads when they uttered their good wishes, and had no confidence in Sir Paul.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE house had fallen into quiet after the gloomy excitement of the morning. All the guests save two or three had gone away, the shutters were opened, the rooms full once more of soft day-light, bright and warm. The event, great and terrible as it was, was over, and ordinary life again begun.

But there was still one piece of business to do. Sir William's will had to be read before the usual routine of existence could be begun again. This grand winding up of the affairs that were at an end, and setting in motion of those which were about to begin, took place in the library late in the afternoon, when all the strangers had departed. The family lawyer, Colonel

Fleetwood, who was Lady Markham's brother, and old Mr. Markham of Edge, the head of the hostile branch which had hoped to inherit everything before Sir William married and showed them their mistake—were the only individuals present along with Lady Markham, Paul, and Alice. There was nothing exciting about the reading of this will; no fear of eccentric dispositions, or of any arrangement different from the just and natural one. Besides, the family knew what it was before it was read. It was merely a part of the sad ceremonial which had to be gone through like the rest. Lady Markham had placed herself as far from the table as possible, with her face turned to the door. She could not bear, yet, to look straight at her husband's vacant place. Her brother stood behind her, leaning thoughtfully against her chair, and Alice was on a low seat by her side. The deep mourning of both the ladies made the paleness which grief and watching had brought more noticeable. Alice had begun to regain a little delicate colour, but her mother was still wan and worn. And they were very weary with the excitement of the gloomy day, and anxious to get away and conclude all these agitating ceremonials. Lady Markham kept her eyes on the door. Her loss was too recent to seem natural. What so likely as that he should come in suddenly, and wonder to see them all collected there?—so much more likely, so much more natural than to believe that for ever he was gone away.

And in the quiet the lawyer began to read—nothing to rouse them, nothing they did not know; his voice, monotonous and calm, seemed to be reading another kind of dull burial service, unbeautiful, without any consolation in it, but full of the heavy, level cadence of ashes to ashes and dust to dust. Paul stirred, almost impatiently, from time to time, and changed his position; it affected his nerves. And sometimes Colonel Fleetwood would give forth a sigh, which meant

impatience too; but the others did not move. Lady Markham's beautiful profile, marble pale, shone like a white cameo upon the dark background of the curtains. She was scarcely conscious what they were doing, submitting to this last duty of all.

When the door opened, which it did, somewhat hastily, it startled the whole party. Lady Markham sat up in her chair and uttered a low cry. Paul turned round angrily. He turned to find fault with the servant who was thus interrupting a solemn conference; but when he saw who the intruder really was, the young man lost all patience.

"This fellow again!" he said under his breath; and he made one stride towards the door, where stood, closing it carefully behind him, while he faced the company, Mr. Gus in his black suit. He was no coward; he faced the young man, whom he had already exasperated, without flinching—putting up his hand with a deprecating, but not undignified, gesture. Paul, who had meant nothing less than to eject him forcibly, came to a sudden stop, and stood hesitating, uncertain, before the self-possessed little figure. What could he do? He was in his house, where discourtesy was a crime.

"Keep your temper, Paul Markham," said the little gentleman; "I mean you no harm. You and I can't help damaging each other; but for heaven's sake, this day, and before *them*, let's settle it with as little disturbance as we can."

"What does this mean?" said Colonel Fleetwood: while the lawyer rested his papers on the table, and looked on, across them, without putting them out of his hand.

"I can't tell what it means," cried Paul. "This is the second time this man has burst into our company, at the most solemn moment, when my father was dying——"

"Mr. Gaveston," said Lady Markham, in her

trembling voice, "I have told you that anything we can do for you, any amends we can make—— But oh, would it not be better to choose another time—to come when we are alone—when there need be no exposure?"

"My Lady Markham," said Gus, advancing to the table, "I don't know what you mean, but you are under a great mistake. It is no fault of yours, and I am sorry for Paul. I might have been disposed to accept a compromise before I saw the place; but anyhow, compromise or not, I must establish my rights."

"This is the most extraordinary interruption of a family in their own house," said Colonel Fleetwood. "What does it mean? Isabel, you seem to know him; who is this man?"

"That is just what she does not know," said Gus, calmly; "and what I've come to tell you. Nothing can be more easy; I have all the evidence here, which your lawyer can examine at once. I wrote to my father when I arrived, but he took no notice. I am Sir Augustus Markham: Sir William Markham's eldest son—and heir."

Lady Markham rose up appalled—her lips falling apart, her eyes opened wide in alarm, her hands clasped together. Paul, whose head had been bent down, started, and raised it suddenly, as if he had not heard rightly.

"Good God!" cried Colonel Fleetwood.

Mr. Scrivener, the lawyer, put down his papers carefully on the table, and rose from his seat.

"The man must be out of his senses," he said.

Mr. Gus looked round upon them all with excitement, in which there was a gleam of triumph. "I am not out of my senses. With such a wrong done to me I might have been; but I never knew of it till lately. And, mind you, I don't blame *them* as if they knew it. If you are the lawyer, I have brought you all the papers, honest and above-board. There they are, my mother's certificates and mine. Ask anybody in the island of

Barbadoes," cried Mr. Gus; "bless you, it was not done in a corner; it was never made a secret of. From the Governor to the meanest black, there isn't one but knows it all as well as I."

He had thrust a packet of papers into Mr. Scrivener's hand, and now stood with one arm extended, like a speaker addressing with energetic, yet conciliatory warmth, a hostile assembly. But no one paid any attention to Mr. Gus. The interest had gone from him to the lawyer who was opening up with care and precaution the different papers. Colonel Fleetwood stood behind Mr. Scrivener eagerly reading them over his shoulder, chafing at his coolness. "Get on, can't you?" he cried, under his breath. They were enough to appal the inexperienced eye. To this astonished spectator looking on, the lines of the marriage certificate seemed to blaze as if written in fire. It was as if a bolt from heaven had fallen among them. The chief sufferers themselves were stunned by the shock of a sudden horror which they did not realise. What did it mean? A kind of pale light came over Lady Markham's face: she began to remember the Lennys and their eccentric visit. She put out her hand as one who has begun to grasp a possible clue.

At this moment of intense and painful bewilderment, a sudden chuckle burst into the quiet. It was poor old Mr. Markham, whose hopes had been disappointed, who had never forgiven Sir William Markham's children for being born. "Gad! I always felt sure there was a previous marriage," he said, mumbling with old toothless jaws. Only the stillness of such a pause would have made this senile voice of malice audible. Even the old man himself was abashed to hear how audible it was.

"A previous marriage!" Colonel Fleetwood went hurriedly to his sister, and took her by the shoulders in fierce excitement, as if she could be to blame. "What does this mean, Isabel?" he cried; "did you know of it? did you consent to it? does it

mean, my God! that you have never been this man's wife at all?"

She turned upon him with a flash of energy and passion. "How dare you speak of my husband so—my husband who was honour itself and truth?" Then the poor lady covered her face with her hands. Her heart sank, her strength forsook her. Who could tell what hidden things might be revealed by the light of this sudden horrible illumination. "I can't tell you. I do not know! I do not know!"

"This will never do," said Mr. Scrivener hurriedly. "This is pre-judging the case altogether. No one can imagine that with no more proof than these papers (which may be genuine or not, I can't say on the spur of the moment) we are going to believe a wild assertion which strikes at the honour of a family——"

"Look here," said Mr. Gus; his mouth began to get dry with excitement, he could scarcely get out the words. "Look here, there's nothing about the honour of the family. There's nothing to torment *her* about. Do you hear, you, whoever you are! My mother, Gussy Gaveston, died five and thirty years ago, when I was born. Poor little thing," cried the man who was her son, with a confusion of pathos and satisfaction, "it was the best thing she could do. She wasn't one to live and put other people to shame, not she. She was a bit of a girl, with no harm in her. The man she married was a young fellow of no account, no older than him there, Paul, my young brother; but all the same she would have been Lady Markham had she lived; and I am her son that cost her her life, the only one of the first family, Sir William's eldest. That's easily seen when you look at us both," he added with a short laugh; "there can't be much doubt, can there, which is the eldest, I or he?"

Here again there was a strange pause. Colonel Fleetwood, who was the spectator who had his wits about him, turned round upon old Mr. Markham, who

ventured to chuckle again in echo of poor Gus's harsh little laugh, which meant no mirth. "What the devil do you find to laugh at?" he said, his lip curling over his white teeth with rage, to which he could give vent no other way. But he was relieved of his worst fear, and he could not help turning with a certain interest to the intruder. Gus was not a noble figure in his old-fashioned long-tailed black-coat, with his formal air; but there was not the least appearance of imposture about him. The serene air of satisfaction and self-importance which returned to his face when the excitement of his little speech subsided, his evident conviction that he was in his right place, and confidence in his position, contradicted to the eyes of the man of the world all suggestion of fraud. He might be deceived: but he himself believed in the rights he was claiming, and he was not claiming them in any cruel way.

As for Paul, since his first angry explanation he had not said a word. The young man looked like a man in a dream. He was standing leaning against the mantelpiece, every tinge of colour gone out of his face, listening, but hardly seeming to understand what was said. He had watched his mother's movements, his uncle's passionate appeal to her, but he had not stirred. As a matter of fact the confusion in his mind was such that nothing was clear to him. He felt as if he had fallen and was still falling, from some great height into infinite space. His feet tingled, his head was light. The sounds around him seemed blurred and uncertain, as well as the faces. While he stood thus bewildered, two arms suddenly surrounded his, embracing it, clinging to him. Paul pressed these clinging hands mechanically to his side, and felt a certain melting, a softness of consolation and support. But whether it was Dolly whispering comfort to him in sight of his father's grave, or Alice bidding him take courage in the midst of a new confusing imbroglio of pain and excitement, he could scarcely have told. Then, however, voices more distinct

came to him, voices quite steady and calm, in their ordinary tones.

"After this interruption it will be better to go no further," the lawyer said. "I can only say that I will consult with my clients, and meet Mr.—, this gentleman's solicitor, on the subject of the extraordinary claim he makes."

"If it is me you mean, I have no solicitor," said Mr. Gus, "and I don't see the need of one. What have you got to say against my papers? They are straightforward enough."

The lawyer was moved to impatience.

"It is ridiculous," he said, "to think that a matter of this importance—the succession to a great property—can be settled in such a summary way. There is a great deal more necessary before we get that length. Lady Markham, I don't think we need detain you longer."

But no one moved. Lady Markham had sunk into her chair too feeble to stand. Her eyes were fixed upon her son and daughter standing together. They seemed to have floated away from her on the top of this wave of strange invasion. She thought there was anger on Paul's pale stern face, but her heart was too faint to go to them, to take the part she ought to take. Did they think she was to blame? How was she to blame? She almost thought so herself as she looked pathetically across the room at her children, who seemed to have forsaken her. Mr. Scrivener made a great rustling and scraping, tying up his papers, putting them together—these strange documents along with the others; for Gus had made no effort to retain them. The lawyer felt with a sinking of his heart that the last doubt of the reality of this claim was removed when the claimant allowed him to keep the certificates which proved his case. In such a matter only men who are absolutely honest put faith in others. "He is not afraid of any appeal to the registers," Mr. Scrivener

said to himself. He made as much noise as he could over the tying up of these papers; but nobody moved to go. At last he took out his watch and examined it.

"Can any one tell me about the trains to town?" he said.

This took away all excuse from old Mr. Markham, who very unwillingly put himself in motion.

"I must go too," he said. "Can I put you down at the station?"

And then these two persons stood together for a minute or more comparing their watches, of which one was a little slow and the other a little fast.

"I think perhaps it will suit me better," the lawyer said, "to wait for the night train."

Then the other reluctantly took his leave.

"I am glad that anyhow it can make no difference to you," he said, pressing Lady Markham's hand; "that would have been worse, much worse, than anything that can happen to Paul."

The insult made her shrink and wince, and this pleased the revengeful old man who had never forgiven her marriage. Then he went to Mr. Gus with a great show of friendliness.

"We're relations, too," he said, "and I hope will be friends. Can I set you down anywhere?"

Mr. Gus looked at him with great severity and did not put out his hand.

"I can't help hurting them, more or less," he said, "for I've got to look after my own rights; but if you think I'll make friends with any one that takes pleasure in hurting them—— I am much obliged to you," Mr. Gus added with much state, "but I am at home, and I don't want to be set down anywhere."

These words, which were quite audible, sent a thrill of amazement through the room. Colonel Fleetwood and Mr. Scrivener looked at each other. Notwithstanding the ruin and calamity which surrounded them, a gleam of amusement went over the lawyer's face.

Gus was moving about restlessly, hovering round the brother and sister who had not changed their position, like a big blue-bottle, moving in circles. He was not at all unlike a blue-bottle in his black coat. Mr. Scrivener went up to him, arresting him in one of his flights.

"I should think—" said the lawyer, "don't you agree with me?—that the family would prefer to be left alone after such an exciting and distressing day?"

"Eh! the family? Yes, that is quite my opinion. You outsiders ought to go, and leave us to settle matters between us," said Gus.

He scarcely looked at the lawyer, so intent was he upon Paul and Alice, who were still standing together, supporting each other. The little man was undisguisedly anxious to listen to what Alice was saying in her brother's ear.

"I am their adviser," said Mr. Scrivener. "I cannot leave till I have done all I can for them; but you Mr.——"

"Sir Augustus, if you please," said the little gentleman, drawing himself up. "If you are their adviser, I, sir, am their brother. You seem to forget that. The family is not complete without me. Leave them to me, and there is no fear but everything will come straight."

Mr. Scrivener looked at this strange personage with a kind of consternation. He was half afraid of him, half amused by him. The genuineness of him filled the lawyer with dismay. He could not entertain a hope that a being so true was false in his pretensions. Besides, there were various things known perhaps only to Mr. Scrivener himself which gave these pretensions additional weight. He shook his head when Colonel Fleetwood, coming up to him on the other side, whispered to him an entreaty to "get the fellow to go." How was he to get the fellow to go? He had not only right, but kindness and the best of intentions on his side.

"My dear sir," he said, perplexed, "you must see, if you think, that your claim, even if true, cannot be accepted in a moment as you seem to expect. We must have time to investigate; any one may call himself Sir William Markham's son."

"But no one except myself can prove it," said Gus, promptly; "and, my dear sir, to use your own words, you had better leave my family to me, as I tell you. I know better than any one else how to manage them. Are they not my own flesh and blood?"

"That may or may not be," said the lawyer, at the end of his reasoning.

It was easy to say "get him to go away," but unless he ejected him by sheer force, he did not see how it was to be done. As for Mr. Gus, he himself saw that the time was come for some further step. First he buttoned his coat as preparing for action, and put down his hat, with its huge hat-band, upon the table. Then he hesitated for a moment between Lady Markham and the young people; finally he said to himself reflectively, almost sadly, "What claim have I upon her?" He moved a step towards Paul and Alice, and cleared his throat.

And it was now that Providence interposed to help the stranger. Just as he had made up his mind to address the young man whom he had superseded, there came a sound of footsteps at the door. It was opened a very little, timidly, and through the chink Bell's little soft voice (she was always the spokeswoman) was heard with a little sobbing catch in it, pleading—

"May we come in now, mamma?"

The children thought everybody was gone. They had been huddled up, out of the way, it seemed, for weeks. They were longing for their natural lives, for their mother, for some way out of the strangeness and desolation of this unnatural life they had been leading. They were all in the doorway, treading upon each other's heels in their eagerness, but subdued by the

influences about which took the courage out of them. It seemed to Mr. Gus an interposition of Providence on his behalf. He went quickly to the door and opened to them, then returned, leading one of the little girls in each hand.

"I told you I was a relation," he said very gravely and kindly, with a certain dignity which now and then took away all that was ridiculous in him. "I am your brother, though you would not think it; your poor dear father who is gone was my father too. He was my father when he was not much older than Paul. I should like to be very fond of you all if you would let me. I would not hurt one of you for the world. Will you give me a kiss, because I am your brother, Bell and Marie?"

The children looked at him curiously with their big eyes, which they had made so much larger with crying. They looked pale and fragile in their black frocks, with their anxious little faces turned up to him.

"Our brother!" they both said in a breath, wondering; but they did not shrink from the kiss he gave, turning with a quivering of real emotion from one to another.

"Yes, my dears," he said, "and a good brother I'll be to you, so help me God!" the little gentleman's brown face got puckered and tremulous, as if he would cry. "I don't want to harm anybody," he said. "I'll take care of the boys as if they were my own. I'll do anything for Paul that he'll let me, though I can't give up my rights to him; and I'll be fond of you all if you let me," cried Mr. Gus, dropping the hands of the children, and holding out his own to the colder, more difficult, audience round him. They all stood looking at him, with keen wonder, opposition, almost hatred. Was it possible they could feel otherwise to the stranger who thus had fallen among them, taking everything that they thought was theirs out of their hands?

CHAPTER XXXI.

It was late, quite late, when Mr. Gus was "got to go away." And it might have proved impossible altogether, but for some one who came for him and would not be denied. Mr. Scrivener was sitting alone with him in the library, from which all the others had gone, when this unknown summons arrived. The lawyer had done all he could to convince him that it was impossible he could remain; but Gus could not see the impossibility. He was hurt that they should wish him to go away, and still more hurt when the lawyer suggested that, in case of his claims being proved, Lady Markham would evacuate the house and leave it to him.

"What would she do that for?" Gus cried. "Did I come here to be left in a great desert all by myself? I won't let them go away."

Between these two determinations the lawyer did not know what to do. He was half-exasperated, half-amused, most reluctant to offend a personage who would have everything in his power as respected the little Markhams, and might make life so much happier, or more bitter, to all of them. He would not offend him for their sake, but neither could he let him take up his abode in the house and thus forestal all future settlement of the question. When the messenger came Mr. Scrivener was very grateful. It left him at liberty to speak with the others whose interests were much closer to his heart. To his surprise the person who came for Gus immediately addressed to him the most anxious questions about Lady Markham and Alice.

"I daren't ask to see them," this stranger said, who was half hidden in the obscurity of the night. "Will

you tell them Edward Fairfax sends his—what do you call it?” said the young man—“duty, the poor people say: my most respectful duty. I stayed for to-day. I should have liked to help to carry him, but I did not feel I had any right.” His eyes glimmered in the twilight as eyes shine only through tears. “I helped to nurse him,” he said in explanation, “poor old gentleman.”

At this moment Gus, helped very obsequiously by Brown, who had got scent of something extraordinary in the air, as servants do, was getting himself into his overcoat.

“Have you anything to do with *him*?” the lawyer replied.

“No further than being in the inn with him. And I thought from what he said they might have a difficulty in getting him away. So I came to fetch him; but not entirely for that either,” Fairfax said.

“Then you never did them a better service,” said the lawyer, “than to-night.”

“I don’t think there is any harm in him,” Fairfax said.

The lawyer shook his head. There might be no harm in him; but what harm was coming because of him! He said nothing, and Gus came out, buttoned up to the throat.

“You’ll not go, I hope, till it is all settled,” he said.

“Settled—it may not be settled for years!” cried the lawyer, testily. And then he turned to the other, who might be a confederate for anything he knew, standing out in the darkness, “What name am I to tell Lady Markham—Fairfax? Keep him away as long as you can,” he whispered; “he will be the death of them.” He thought afterwards that he was in some degree committing himself as allowing that Gus possessed the power of doing harm, which it would have been better policy altogether to deny.

Thus it was not till nightfall that the lawyer was able

to communicate to his clients his real opinion. All the exhaustion and desire of repose which generally follows such a period of domestic distress had been made an end of by this extraordinary new event. Lady Markham was sitting in her favourite room, wrapped in a shawl, talking low with her brother and Alice, when Mr. Scrivener came in. He told them how it was that he had got free, and gave them the message Fairfax had sent. But it is to be feared that the devotion and delicacy of it suffered in transmission. It was his regards or his respects, and not his duty, which the lawyer gave. What could the word matter? But he reported the rest more or less faithfully. "He thought there would be a difficulty in getting rid of our little friend," Mr. Scrivener said, "and therefore he came. It was considerate."

"Yes, it was very considerate," Lady Markham said, but, unreasonably, the ladies were both disappointed and vexed, they could not tell why, that their friend should thus make himself appear the supporter of their enemy. Their hearts chilled to him in spite of themselves. Paul had gone out; he was not able to bear any more of it; he could not rest. "Forgive my boy, Mr. Scrivener," his mother said; "he never was patient, and think of all he has lost."

"Mr. Paul," said the lawyer coldly, "might have endured the restraint for one evening, seeing I have waited on purpose to be of use to him."

The hearts of all three sank to their shoes when Mr. Scrivener, who was his adviser, his supporter, the chief prop he had to trust to—who had called the young man Sir Paul all the morning—thus changed his title. Lady Markham put out her hand and grasped his arm.

"You have given it up, then!" she said. "You have given it up! There is no more hope!"

And though he would not allow this, all that Mr. Scrivener had to say was the reverse of hopeful. He was aware of Sir William's residence in Barbadoes,

which his wife had never heard of until the Lennys had betrayed it to her, and of many other little matters which sustained and gave consistence to the story of Gus. They sat together till late, going over everything, and before they separated it was tacitly concluded among them that all was over, that there was no more hope. The lawyer still spoke of inquiries, of sending a messenger to Barbadoes, and making various attempts to defend Paul's position. After all, it resolved itself into a question of Paul. Lady Markham could not be touched one way or another, and the fortunes of the children were secured. But Paul—how was Paul to bear this alteration in everything, this ruin of his life?

"It is all over now," Lady Markham said to her daughter, as after this long and terrible day they went up stairs together. "Whatever might have been, it is past hoping now. He will go with those people, and I shall never see my boy more."

What could Alice say? She cried, which seemed the only thing possible. There was no use in tears, but there is sometimes relief when no other outlet is possible. They wept together, thankful that at least there were two of them to mingle their tears. And Paul had not come in. He was wandering about the woods in the moonlight, not caring for anything, his head light, and his feet heavy. He had fallen, fallen, he scarcely knew where or when. Instead of the subdued and sad happiness of the morning, a sense of wounding and bruising and miserable downfall was in him and about him. He did not know where he was going, though he was acquainted with every glade and tangled alley of those familiar woods. Once (it was now September) he was seized by the gamekeepers, who thought him a poacher, and whose alarmed apologies and excuses when they discovered that it was Sir Paul, gave him a momentary sensation of self-disgust as if it were he who was the impostor. "I am not Sir Paul," was on his lips to say, but he did not seem to care

enough for life to say it. One delusion more or less, what did it matter?

He walked and walked, till he was footsore with fatigue. He went past the Markham Arms in the dark, and saw his supplanter through the inn window talking—to whom?—to Fairfax. What had Fairfax to do with it? Was it a scheme invented by Fairfax to humble him? Then the unhappy young fellow strayed to his father's grave, all heaped up and covered with the flowers that shone pale in the moonlight, quite detached from the surrounding graves and upturned earth. He sat down there, all alone in the silence of the world, and noticed, in spite of himself, how the night air moved the leaves and grasses, and how the moonlight slowly climbed the great slope of the skies. When the church tower came for a little while between him and the light, he shivered. He dropped his head into his hands and thought he slept. The night grew tedious to him, the darkness unendurable. He went away to the woods again, with a vague sense that to be taken for a poacher, or even shot by chance round the bole of a tree, would be the best thing that could happen. Neither Sir Paul nor any one—not even a poacher: what was he? A semblance, a shadow, a vain show—not the same as he who had walked with his face to heaven in the morning, and everything expanding, opening out around him. In a moment they had all collapsed like a house of cards. He did not want to go home; home! it was not home—nor to see his mother, nor to talk to any one. The hoot of the owl, the incomprehensible stirring of the woods were more congenial to him than human voices. What could they talk about? Nothing but this on which there was nothing to say. Supplanted! Yes, he was supplanted, turned out of his natural place by a stranger. And what could he do? He could not fight for his inheritance, which would have been a kind of consolation—unless indeed it were a law-fight in the courts, where

there would be swearing and counter-swearing, and all the dead father's life raked up, and perhaps shameful stories told of the old man who had to-day been laid in his grave with so much honour. This was the only way in which in these days a man could fight.

But it was only now and then, by intervals, that Paul's thoughts took any form so definite. He did not want to think. There was in him a vague and general sense of destruction—ruin, downfall, and humiliation which he could not endure. But, strangely enough, in all this he never thought of the plans which so short a while ago he had considered as shaping his life. He did not think that now he could go back to them, and, free from all encumbrances of duty, pursue the way he had chosen. The truth was, he did not think of them at all. In the morning Spears and his colleagues had come to his mind as something from which he had escaped, but at night he did not think of them at all. They were altogether wiped out of his mind and obliterated by the loss of that which he had never possessed.

When he went home all the lights in the great house seemed extinguished save one candle which flickered in the hall window, and the light in his mother's room, which shone out like a star into the summer darkness. It was Alice who came noiseless, before he could knock, and opened the great door.

"Mamma cannot sleep till she has seen you," said the girl. "Oh, Paul, we must think of her now. I sent all the servants to bed. I have been watching for you at the window. I could not bear Brown and the rest to think that there was anything wrong."

"But they must soon know that everything is wrong. It is not a thing that can be hid."

"Perhaps it may be hid, Paul. It may turn out it is all a delusion—or an imposture."

"Let us go to my mother's room," said Paul.

He said nothing as he went up the stairs, but when he got to the landing he turned round upon the pale

girl beside him carrying the light, whose white face illuminated by her candle made a luminous point in the gloom. He turned round to her all at once in the blackness of the great vacant place.

"It is no imposture; it is true. Whether we can bear it or not, it is true!"

"God will help us to bear it, Paul; if you will not desert us—if you will stay by us—"

"Desert you—was there ever any question of deserting you?" he said. He looked at his sister with a half-complaining curiosity and surprise, and shrugged his shoulders, so foolish did it sound to him. Then he took the candle from her hand, almost rudely, and walked before her to their mother's room. "You women never understand," he said.

CHAPTER XXXII.

AFTER this a sudden veil and silence fell upon Markham. Nothing could be more natural than that this should be the case. Paul went to town with his uncle Fleetwood and the family lawyer, and shortly after the boys went back to school, and perfect silence fell upon the mourning house. The woods began to be touched by that finger of autumn which is chill rather than fiery, notwithstanding Mr. Tennyson—a yellow flag hung out here and there to warn the summer world, still in full brightness, of what was coming; but no crack of gun was to be heard among the covers. The county persistently and devotedly came to call, but Lady Markham was not yet able to see visitors. She was visible at church and sometimes driving, but never otherwise, which was all quite natural too, seeing that she was a woman who had always been a tender wife. No whisper of any complication, of anything that made grief harder to bear had escaped from the house. Or so at least

they thought who lived an anxious life there, not knowing what was to happen. But nevertheless by some strange magnetism in the air it was known from one end to another of the county that there was something mysterious going on. The servants had felt it in the air almost before the family themselves knew. When Brown helped "the little furrin gentleman" on with his coat on the evening of the funeral day do you think he did not know that this was his future master? The knowledge breathed even about the cottages and into the village, where generally the rustic public was obtuse enough in mastering any new fact. The young master who had been Sir Paul for one brief day sank into Mr. Paul again, nobody knowing how, and what was still more wonderful, nobody asking why. Among the higher classes there was more distinct curiosity, and many floating rumours. That there was a new claimant everybody was aware; and that there was to be a great trial unfolding all the secrets of the family for generations and showing a great many respectable personages to the world in an entirely new light, most people hoped. It was generally divined and understood that the odd little foreigner (as everybody thought him) who had made himself conspicuous at the funeral, and whom many people had met walking about the roads, was the new heir. But how he came by his claim few people understood. Sir William was not the man to be the hero of any doubtful story, or to leave any uncertainty upon the succession to his property. This was just the one evil which no one, not even his political enemies, could think him capable of; therefore the imagination of his county neighbours threw itself further back upon his two brothers who had preceded him. Of these Sir Paul was known to have borne no spotless reputation in his youth, and even Sir Harry might have had antecedents that would not bear looking into. From one or other of these, the county concluded, and not through Sir William, this family misfortune must have come.

One morning during this interval, when Paul was absent and all the doings of the household at Markham were mysteriously hidden from the world, a visitor came up the avenue who was not of the usual kind. She seemed for some time very doubtful whether to go to the great door, or to seek an entrance in a more humble way. She was a tall and slim young woman, dressed in a black alpacca gown, with a black hat and feather, and a shawl over her arm, a nondescript sort of person, not altogether a lady, yet whom Charles, the footman, contemplated more or less respectfully, not feeling equal to the impertinence of bidding her go round to the servants' door; for how could any one tell, he said? there were governesses and that sort that stood a deal more on their dignity than the ladies themselves. Mrs. Fry, who happened to see her from a window in the wing where she was superintending the great autumn cleaning in the nursery, concluded that it was some one come about the lady's-maid's place, for Alice's maid was going to be married. "But if you get it," said Mrs. Fry mentally, "I can tell you it's not long you'll go trolloping about with that long feather, nor wear a bit of a hat stuck on the top of your head." While, however, Mrs. Fry was forming this rapid estimate of her, Charles looked at the young person with hesitating respect, and behaved with polite condescension, coming forward as she approached. When she asked if she could see Lady Markham, Charles shook his head. "My lady don't see nobody," he replied with an ease of language which was the first symptom he showed of feeling himself on an equality with the visitor. It was the tone of her voice which had produced this effect. Charles knew that this was not how a lady spoke.

"But she'll see me, if she knows who I am," said the girl. "I know she'll see me if you'll be so kind as to take up my name. Say Miss Janet Spears—as she saw in Oxford—"

"If you've come about the lady's-maid's place," said

Charles, "there's our housekeeper, Mrs. Fry, she'll see you."

"I haven't come about no lady's-maid's place. You had better take up my name, or it will be the worse for you after," cried the girl angrily. She gave him such a look that Charles shook in his shoes. He begged her pardon humbly, and went off to seek Brown, leaving her standing at the door.

Then Brown came and inspected her from the further side of the hall. "I don't know why you should bother me, or me go and bother my lady," said Brown, not satisfied with the inspection; "take her to Missis Fry."

"But she won't go. It's my lady she wants, and just you look at her, what she wants she'll have, that's sure; she says it'll be the worse for us after."

"What name did you say?" asked Brown. "I'll tell Mrs. Martin, and she can do as she thinks proper." Mrs. Martin was Lady Markham's own maid. Thus it was through a great many hands that the name of Janet Spears reached Lady Markham's seclusion. Charles was very triumphant when the message reached him that the young person was to go up stairs. "I told you," he said to Mr. Brown. But Brown on his part was satisfied to know that it was only "a young person," not a lady, whom his mistress admitted. His usual discrimination had not deserted him. As for Janet, the great staircase overawed her more than even the exterior of the house; the size and the grandeur took away her breath; and though she felt no respect for Charles, the air as of a dignified clergyman with which Mr. Brown stepped out before her, to guide her to Lady Markham's room, not deigning to say anything, impressed her more than words could tell. No clergyman she had ever encountered had been half so imposing; though Janet from a general desire to better herself in the world, and determination not to lower herself to the level of her father's companions, had always been

a good churchwoman and eschewed Dissenters. But Mr. Brown, it may well be believed, in the gloss of his black clothes and the perfection of his linen, was not to be compared with a hardworking parish priest exposed to all weathers. By the time she had reached Lady Markham's door her breath was coming quick with fright and excitement. Lady Markham herself had made no such strong impression. Her dress had not been what Janet thought suitable for a great lady. She had felt a natural scorn for a woman who, having silks and satins at her command, could come out in simple stuff no better than her own. Mrs. Martin, however, had a black silk which "could have stood alone," and everything combined to dazzle the rash visitor. Now that she had got so far her knees began to tremble beneath her. Lady Markham was standing awaiting her, in deep mourning, looking a very different person from the beautiful woman whom Janet had seen standing in the sunshine in her father's shop. She made a step forward to receive her visitor, a movement of anxiety and eagerness; then waited till the door was shut upon her attendant. "You have come—from your father?" she said.

"No, my lady." Now that it had come to the point Janet felt an unusual shyness come over her. She cast down her eyes and twisted her fingers round the handle of the umbrella she carried. "My father was away: I had a day to spare: and I thought I'd come and ask you——"

"Do not be afraid. Tell me what it is you want; is it——" Lady Markham hesitated more than Janet did. Was it something about Paul? What could it be but about Paul? but she would not say anything to open that subject again.

"It is about Mr. Paul, my lady. There isn't any reason for me to hesitate. It was you that first put it into my head——"

Now it was Lady Markham's turn to droop. "I am

very sorry," she said involuntarily. "I was—mised—"

"Oh, I don't know as there's anything to be sorry about. Mr. Paul—I suppose he is Sir Paul, now?"

As Janet's gaze, no longer shy, dwelt pointedly on her dress by way of justifying the question, Lady Markham shrank back a little. "It is not—quite settled," she said faintly; "there are some—unexpected difficulties."

"Oh!" Janet's eyes grew round as her exclamation, an expression of surprise and profound disappointment went over her face. "Will he not be a baronet then, after all?" she said.

"These are family matters which I have not entered into with any one," said Lady Markham, recovering herself. "I cannot discuss them now—unless—" here her voice faltered, "you have any right—"

"I should think a girl just had a right where all her prospects are concerned," said Janet. "It was that brought me here. I wanted you to know, my lady, that I've advised Mr. Paul against it—against the emigration plan. If he goes it won't be to please me. I don't want him to go. I don't want to go myself—and that's what I've come here for. If so be," said Janet, speaking deliberately, "as anything is to come of it between him and me, I should be a deal happier and a deal better pleased to stay on at home; and I thought if you knew that you'd give up opposing. I've said it to him as plain as words can say. And if he will go, it will be your blame and not mine. It will be because he thinks you've set your face so against it, that *that's* the only way."

Lady Markham trembled so much that she could not stand. She sank down upon a chair. "Pardon me," she said involuntarily, "I have not been well."

"Oh, don't mention it, my lady," said Janet, taking a chair too. "I was just a going to ask you if you wouldn't sit down and make yourself comfortable." She had got over her shyness; but that which liberated

her threw Lady Markham into painful agitation. It seemed to her that she had the fate of her son thrown back into her hands. If she withdrew all opposition to this marriage, would he indeed give up his wild ideas and stay at home? If she opposed it, would he persevere? and how could she oppose anything he had set his heart upon after all he had to renounce on his side, poor boy? She did not know how to reply or how to face such a dilemma. To help to make this woman Paul's wife—or to lose Paul altogether—what a choice it was to make! Her voice was choked by the fluttering of her heart.

"My son," she said, faintly, "has never spoken to me on the subject."

"It is not likely," said Janet, "when he knows he would meet with nothing but opposition. For my part I'm willing, very willing, to stay at home. I never went in with the emigration plan. Father is a good man, and very steady, and has been a good father to us; but whenever it comes to planning, there's no telling the nonsense he's got in his head."

"Does your father know that you have come to see me?" Lady Markham said. With Spears himself she had some standing-ground. She knew how to talk to the demagogue, understood him, and he her; but the young woman she did not understand. Paul's mother, notwithstanding all her experience, was half afraid of this creature, so straightforward, so free of prejudice, so—sensible. Yes, it was sense, no doubt. Janet did not want to go away. She had no faith in her father, nor in the man who was going, she hoped, to be her husband. Lady Markham, herself capable of enthusiasm and devotion, and who could so well, in her maturity, have understood the folly of a girl ready to follow to the end of the world for love, was almost afraid of Janet. She was cowed by her steady look, the bargain she evidently wished to make. She took refuge, as it were, in Spears, mentally appealing to him in her heart.

"No," said Janet, "no one knows. He is away from home on one of his speechifyings. Don't think I hold with that, my lady. England's good enough for me, and things as they are; and if so be as you will make up your mind not to go against us, Mr. Paul shall never go to foreign parts through me. But he is Sir Paul, ain't he?" the young woman said.

"I will do nothing—to make my son unhappy," said Lady Markham. How could she help but sigh to think that this was the woman that could make him happy? "He is not at home," she added with a tone of relief.

"But he is Sir Paul? What is the good of deceiving me, when I can hear from any one—the gentleman down stairs, or any one."

"Is there a gentleman down stairs?" Lady Markham thought some one must have come bringing news, perhaps, while she was shut up here.

Janet blushed crimson. Now she had indeed made a mistake. She avoided all reply which might have led to the discovery that Brown was the gentleman she meant; but this glaring error made her humbler.

"You are very kind, my lady, to speak so reasonable," she said. "And if you like to tell Mr. Paul that I'm as set against emigration as you are—I am not one that will be put upon," said Janet; "but if we're both to be the same, you and me, both Lady Markhams," here she paused a moment to draw a long breath, half overcome by the thought which in this scene became so dazzlingly real and possible, "I think it would be a real good thing if we could be friends."

This thought, which fluttered Janet, made Lady Markham faint. The blood seemed to ebb away from her heart as she heard these words. She could not make any reply. It was true enough what the girl said, and if she should ever be Paul's wife, no doubt his mother would be bound to be her friend. But she could not speak in reply. There was a pause. And

Janet looked round the richly-furnished, luxurious room, which was not indeed by any means so fine as she would have thought natural, with much curiosity and interest. The sight of all its comforts revealed to her the very necessities they were intended to supply, and which had no existence in her primitive state. Janet was not unreasonable. She was content with the acquiescence she had elicited. Lady Markham had not resisted her nor denounced her, as it was quite on the cards that she might have done. "You have a very grand house, and a beautiful place here, my lady," she said. Lady Markham, more than ever subdued, made a faint sound of assent in reply. "I should like to see over it," Janet said.

"Miss—Spears!"

"Oh, I don't mind, if you would rather not! Some people don't like them that is to come after them. I have said all I came to say, my lady. So perhaps I had better just say good-bye."

And Janet rose and put forth a moist hand in a black glove. She had got these black gloves and the hat out of compliment to the family. Never had a friendly and hospitable woman been in a greater difficulty. "I am not seeing any one," Lady Markham faltered; "but—should you not like some refreshment before you go?"

Janet paused. She would have liked to have eaten in such a house. What they eat there must be different from the common fare with which she was acquainted, and a man in livery to wait behind her chair was an idea which thrilled her soul; but when Lady Markham rang the bell, and ordered Mrs. Martin to have a tray brought up stairs, she started in high offence.

"No, my lady; if I'm not good enough to take my meals with you, I'll have nothing in this house," she cried, and flounced indignant out of the room. This was the summary end of the first visit paid to Markham by Janet Spears.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE day after Paul's departure for London with his lawyer and his uncle, Mr. Gus left the Markham Arms. By a fatality Fairfax thought, he too was going away at the same time. He had gone up to Markham in the morning early for no particular reason. He said to himself that he wanted to see the house of which he had so strangely become an inmate for a little while and then had been swept out of, most probably for ever. To think that he knew all those rooms as familiarly as if they belonged to him, and could wander about them in his imagination, and remember whereabouts the pictures hung on the walls, and how the patterns went in the carpet, and yet never had seen them a month ago, and never might see them again! It is a strange experience in a life when this happens, but not a very rare one. Sometimes the passer-by is made for a single evening, for an hour or two, the sharer of an existence which drops entirely into the darkness afterwards, and is never visible to him again. Fairfax asked himself somewhat sadly if this was how it was to be. He thought that he would never in his life forget one detail of those rooms, the very way the curtains hung, the covers on the tables: and yet they could never be anything to him except a picture in his memory, hanging suspended between the known and the unknown. The great door was open as he had known it ("It is always open," he said to himself), and all the windows of the sitting-rooms, receiving the full air and sunshine into them. But up stairs the house was not yet open. Over some of the windows the curtains were drawn. Where they still sleeping, the two women who were in his thoughts? He cared much less in comparison for the rest of the family. Paul, indeed, being

in trouble, had been much in his mind as he came up the avenue ; but Paul had not been here when Fairfax had lived in the house, and did not enter into his recollections ; and Paul he knew was away now. But the two ladies—Alice, whom he had been allowed to spend so many lingering hours with, whom he had told so much about himself—and Lady Markham, whom he had never ceased to wonder at ; they had taken him into the very closest circle of their friendship ; they had said “Go,” and he had gone ; or “Come,” and he had always been ready to obey. And now was he to see no more of them for ever ? Fairfax could not but feel very melancholy when this thought came into his mind. He came slowly up the avenue, looking at the old house. The old house he called it to himself, as people speak of the home they have loved for years. He would never forget it though already perhaps they had forgotten him. His foot upon the gravel caught the ear of Mr. Brown, who came to the door and looked out curiously. When things of a mysterious character are happening in a house the servants are always vigilant. Brown came down stairs early ; he suffered no sound to pass unnoticed. And now he came out into the early sunshine, and looked about like a man determined to let nothing escape him. And the sight of Fairfax was a welcome sight, for was not he “mixed up” with the whole matter, and probably able to throw light upon some part of it, could he be got to speak.

“I hope I see you well, sir,” said Mr. Brown. “This is a sad house, sir—not like what it was a little time ago. We have suffered a great affliction, sir, in the loss of Sir William.”

“I am going away, Brown,” said Fairfax. “I came up to ask for the ladies. Tell me what you can about them. How is Lady Markham ? She must have felt it terribly, I fear.”

“Yes, sir, and all that’s happened since,” said Brown. “A death, sir, is a thing we must all look forward to.

That will happen from time to time, and nobody can say a word ; but there's a deal happened since, Mr. Fairfax—and that do try my lady the worst of all."

Fairfax did not ask what had happened, which Mr. Brown very shrewdly took as conclusive that he knew all about it. He said half to himself, "I will leave a card, though that means nothing ;" and then he mused long over the card, trying to put more than a message ever contained into the little space at his disposal. This was at last what he produced—

With	but always at Lady Markham's service to the end of his life
EDWARD FAIRFAX'S	
most respectful and affectionate humble duty, his best wishes, his completest sympathy, only longing to be able to do anything, to be of any use. Going away <i>Trin: Coll.</i> with a heavy heart,	

When he had written this—and only when he had written it—it occurred to him how much better it would have been to have written a note, and then he hesitated whether to tear his card in pieces ; but on reflection, decided to let it go. He thought the crowded lines would discourage Brown from the attempt to decipher it.

"You will give them that, and tell them—but there is no need for telling them anything," Fairfax said with a sigh.

"You are going away, sir ?"

"Yes, Brown"—he said, confidentially, "directly," feeling as if he could cry ; and Brown felt for the poor young fellow. He thought over the matter for a moment, and reflected that if things were to go

badly for the family, it would be a good thing for Miss Alice to have a good husband ready at hand. Various things had given Brown a high opinion of Fairfax. There were signs about him—which perhaps only a person of Mr. Brown's profession could fully appreciate—of something like wealth. Brown could scarcely have explained to any one the grounds on which he built this hypothesis, but all the same he entertained it with profound conviction. He eyed the card with great interest, meaning to peruse it by and by; and then he said—

"I beg your pardon, sir, but I think Miss Alice is just round the corner, with the young ladies and the young gentlemen. You won't mention, sir, as I said it—but I think you'll find them all there."

Fairfax was down the steps in a moment; but then paused :

"I wonder if it will be an intrusion," he said; then he made an abject and altogether inappropriate appeal, "Brown! do you think I may venture, Brown?"

"I would, sir, if I was you," said that personage with a secret chuckle, but the seriousness of his countenance never relaxed. He grinned as the young man darted away in the direction he had pointed out. Brown was not without sympathy for tender sentiments. And then he fell back upon those indications already referred to. A good husband was always a good thing, he said to himself.

And Fairfax skimmed as if on wings round the end of the wing to a bit of lawn which they were all fond of—where he had played with the boys and talked with Alice often before. When he got within sight of it, however, he skimmed the ground no longer. He began to get alarmed at his own temerity. The blackness of the group on the grass which he had seen only in their light summer dresses gave him a sensation of pain. He went forward very timidly, very doubtfully. Alice was standing with her back towards him, and it was only

when he was quite near that she turned round. She gave a little startled cry—"Mr. Fairfax!" and smiled; then her eyes filled with tears. She held out one hand to him and covered her face with the other. The little girls seeing this began to cry too. For the moment it was their most prevailing habit. Fairfax took the outstretched hand into both his, and what could he do to show his sympathy but kiss it?—a sight which filled Bell and Marie with wonder, seeing it, as they saw the world in general, through that blurred medium of tears.

"I could not help coming," he said, "forgive me! just to look at the windows. I know them all by heart. I had no hope of so much happiness as to see—any one; but I could not—it was impossible to go away—without——"

Here they all thought he gave a little sob too, which said more than words, and went to their hearts.

"But, Mr. Fairfax," said Bell, "you were here before——"

"Yes; I could not go away. I always thought it possible that there might be some errand—something you would tell me to do. At all events I must have stayed for——"

The funeral he would have added. He could not but feel that though Alice had given him her hand, there was a little hesitation about her.

"But, Mr. Fairfax," Bell began again, "you were staying at the inn with—the little gentleman. Don't you know he is our enemy now?"

"I don't think he is your enemy," Fairfax said—which was not at all what he meant to say.

"Hush, Bell, that was not what it was; only mamma thought—and I—that poor Paul was your friend and that you would not have put yourself—on the other side."

"I put myself on the other side!" cried the young man. "Oh, how little you know! I was going to offer to go out to that place myself to make sure, for it does

not matter where I go. I am not of consequence to any one like Paul; but——”

“But—what?”

Alice half put out her hand to him again.

“You will not think this is putting myself on the other side. It all looks so dreadfully genuine,” said Fairfax, sinking his voice.

Only Alice heard what he said. She was unreasonable, as girls are.

“In that case we will not say anything more on the subject, Mr. Fairfax; you cannot expect us to agree with you,” she said. “Good-bye. I will tell mamma you have called.”

She turned away from him as she spoke, then cast a glance at him from under her eyelids, angry yet relenting. They stood for a moment like the lovers in Molière, eying each other timidly, sadly—but there was no one to bring them together, to say the necessary word in the ear of each. Poor Fairfax uttered a sigh so big that it seemed to move the branches round. He said—

“Good-bye then, Miss Markham; won’t you shake hands with me before I go?”

“Good-bye,” said Alice faintly. She wanted to say something more, but what could she say? Another moment and he was gone altogether, hurrying down the avenue.

“Oh, how nasty you were to poor Mr. Fairfax,” cried Bell. “And he was always so kind. Don’t you remember, Marie, how he ran all the way in the rain to fetch the doctor? even George wouldn’t go. He said he couldn’t take a horse out, and was frightened of the thunder among the trees; but Mr. Fairfax only buttoned his coat and flew.”

“The boys said,” cried little Marie, “that they were sure he would win the mile—in a moment——”

“Oh, children,” cried Alice, “what do you know about it? you will break my heart talking such nonsense

—when there is so much trouble in the house. I am going in to mamma.”

But things were not much better there, for she found Lady Markham with Fairfax's card in her hand, which she was reading with a great deal of emotion. “Put it away with the letters,” Lady Markham said. They had kept all the letters which they received after Sir William's death by themselves in the old despatch-box which had always travelled with him wherever he went, and which now stood—with something of the same feeling which might have made them appropriate the greenest paddock to his favourite horse—in Lady Markham's room. Some of them were very “beautiful letters.” They had been dreadful to receive morning by morning, but they were a kind of possession—an inheritance now.

“Put it with the letters,” Lady Markham said; “any one could see that his very heart was in it. He knew your dear father's worth; he was capable of appreciating him; and he knows what a loss we have had. Poor boy—I will never forget his kindness—never as long as I live.”

“But, mamma,” said Alice, loyal still though her heart was melting, “you know you thought it very strange of Mr. Fairfax to take that horrid little man's part against Paul.”

“I can't think he did anything of the sort,” Lady Markham said, but she would not enter into the question.

It was not wonderful, however, if Alice was angry. She had sent him away because of the general family anger against him; and lo, nobody seemed to feel that anger except herself.

But it may be easily understood how Fairfax felt it a fatality when he found Gus's portmanteaux packed, and himself awaiting his return to go by the same train.

“Why should I stay here?” he said. “I did not

come to England to stay in a village inn. I will go with you, and go to that lawyer, and get it all settled. Why should they make such a fuss about it? I mean no one any harm. Why can't they take to me and make me one of the family? except that I should be there instead of my poor father; I don't know what difference it need make."

"But that makes a considerable difference," said Fairfax. "You must perceive that."

"Of course it makes a difference; between father and son there is always a difference—but less with me than with most people. I do not want to marry, for instance. Most men marry when they come into their estates. There was once a girl in the island," said Gus, with a sigh; "but things were going badly, and she married a man in the Marines. No, if they will consent to consider me as one of the family—I like the children, and Alice seems a nice sort of girl, and my stepmother a respectable motherly woman——, ah?"

Some hostile sound escaped from Fairfax which made the little gentleman look up with great surprise. He had not a notion why his friend should object to what he said.

But the end was that the two did go to town together, and that it was Fairfax who directed this enemy of his friends' where to go, and how to manage his business. Gus was perfectly helpless, not knowing anything about London, and would have been as likely to settle himself in Fleet Street as in Piccadilly—perhaps more so. Fairfax could not get rid of his companion till he had put him in communication with the lawyer, and generally looked after all his affairs. For himself nothing could be more ill-omened. He went about asking himself what would the Markhams think of him?—and yet what could he do? Gus's mingled perplexity and excitement in town were amusing, but they were embarrassing too. He wanted to go and see the Tower and St. Paul's. He wanted Fairfax to tell him

exactly what he ought to give to every cabman. He stood in the middle of the crowd in the streets folding his arms, and resisting the stream which would have carried him one way or the other.

"You call this a free country, and yet one cannot even walk as one likes," he said. "Why are these fellows jostling me; do they want to rob me?"

Fairfax did not know what to do with the burden thus thrown on his hands.

And it may be imagined what the young man's sensations were, when having just deposited Gus in the dining-room of one of the junior clubs of which he was a member, he met Paul upon the steps of the building coming in. Paul was a member too. Fairfax was driven to his wits' end. The little gentleman was tired, and would not budge an inch until he had eaten his luncheon and refreshed himself. What was to be done? Paul was not too friendly even to himself.

"Are you here, too, Markham? I thought there was nobody in London but myself," Fairfax said.

"There are only a few millions for those who take them into account; but some people don't——"

"Oh, you know what I mean," Fairfax said. And then they stood and looked at each other. Paul was pale. His mourning gave him a formal look, not unlike his father. He had the air of some young official on duty, with a great deal of unusual care and responsibility upon him.

"You look as if you were the head of an office," said Fairfax, attempting a smile.

"It would not be a bad thing," said the other languidly; "but the tail would be more like it than the head. I must do something of that kind."

"Do you mean that you are going into public life?"

"That depends upon what *you* mean by public life," said Paul. "I am not, for instance, going into Parliament, though there were thoughts of that once;

but I have got to work, my good fellow, though that may seem odd to you."

"To work!" Fairfax echoed with dismay; which dismay was not because of the work, but because the means of getting him out of the place, and out of risk of an encounter with Gus, became less and less every moment. Paul laughed with a forced and theatrical laugh. In short, he was altogether a little theatrical—his looks, his dress, everything about him. In the excess of his determination to bear his downfall like a man, he was playing with exaggerated honesty the part of a fallen gentleman and ruined heir.

"You think that very alarming then? but I assure you it depends altogether on how you look at it. My father worked incessantly, and it was his glory. If I work, not as a chief, but as an underling, it will not be a bit less honourable."

"Markham, can you suppose for a moment that I think it less honourable?" said Fairfax; "quite otherwise. But does it mean——? Stop, I must tell you something before I ask you any questions. That little beggar who calls himself your brother——"

"I believe he is my brother," said Paul, formally; and then he added with another laugh: "that is the noble development to which the house of Markham has come."

"He is there. Yes, in the dining-room, waiting for his luncheon. One moment, Markham!—we were at the inn in the village together, and he has hung himself on to me. What could I do? he knew nothing about London; he is as helpless as a baby. And the ladies," said Fairfax, his countenance changing, "the ladies—take it as a sign that I am siding with him against you."

He felt a quiver come over his face like that of a boy who is complaining of ill-usage, and for the moment could scarcely subdue a rueful laugh at his own expense; but Paul laughed no more. He became more

than ever like the head of an office, too young for his post, and solemnised by the weight of it. His face shaped itself into still more profound agreement with the solemnity of those black clothes.

"Pardon me, my good fellow," he said. Paul was not one of the men to whom this mode of address comes natural. There was again a theatrical heroism in his look. "Pardon me; but in such a matter as this I don't see what your siding could do for either one or the other. It is fact that is in question, nothing else."

And with a hasty good day he turned and went down the steps where they had been talking. Fairfax was left alone, and never man stood on the steps of a club and looked out upon the world and the passing cabs and passengers with feelings more entirely uncomfortable. He had not been unfaithful in a thought to his friend, but all the circumstances were against him. For a few minutes he stood and reflected what he should do. He could not go and sit down at table comfortably with the unconscious little man who had made the breach; and yet he could not throw him over. Finally he sent a message by one of the servants to tell Gus that he had been called unexpectedly away, and set off down the street at his quickest pace. He walked a long way before he stopped himself. He was anxious to make it impossible that he should meet either Gus again or Paul. Soon the streets began to close in. A dingier and darker part of London received him. He walked on, half interested, half disgusted. How seldom, save perhaps in a hansom driven at full speed, had he ever traversed those streets leading one out of another, these labyrinths of poverty and toil. As he went on, thinking of many things that he had thought of lightly enough in his day, and which were suggested by the comparison between the region in which he now found himself and that which he had left—the inequalities and unlikeness of mankind, the strange difference of fate—his ear was suddenly caught

by the sound of a familiar voice. Fairfax paused, half thinking that it was the muddle in his mind, caused by that association of ideas with the practical drama of existence in which he found himself involved, which suggested this voice to him; but looking round he suddenly found himself, as he went across one of the many narrow streets which crossed the central line of road, face to face with the burly form of Spears.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

"You here, too," said the demagogue; "I thought this was a time when all you fine folks were enjoying yourselves, and London was left to the toilers and moilers."

"Am I one of the fine folks? I am afraid that proves how little you know of them, Spears."

"Well, I don't pretend to know much," said Spears. "Markham's here, too. And what is all this about Markham? I don't understand a word of it."

"What is about him?"

Fairfax was determined to breathe no word of Paul's altered circumstances to any one, sheltering himself under the fact that he himself knew nothing definite. The orator looked at him with a gaze which it was difficult to elude.

"I thought you had been with the family at that grand house of theirs? However! Paul was hot upon our emigration scheme, you know; he would hear no reason on that subject. I warned him that it was not a thing for men like him, with soft hands and muscles unstrung; but he paid me no attention. There was another thing, I believe, a secondary motive," said Spears, with a wave of his hand, "a thing that never would have come into my head, which his mother found out—the kind of business that women do find out.

Well! His father is dead, and I suppose he has come into the title and all that. But here's the rub. We are within a fortnight of our start, and never another word from Paul. What does he mean by it? has he been persuaded by the women? has he thrown us overboard and gone in for the old business of landlord and aristocrat? I have told him many a time it was in his blood; but never was there one more hot for better principles. Now look here, Fairfax, you're not the man to pretend ignorance. What do you know?"

"Nothing but that Sir William is dead."

"Sir William is dead, that means, long live Sir Paul: *lay roy est mortt, veeve lay roy*," said Spears, with honest English pronunciation. "Yes, the papers would tell you that. If he's going to give it all up," he went on, a deep colour coming over his face, "I sha'n't be surprised. I don't say that I'll like it, but I sha'n't be surprised. A large property—and a title—may be a temptation: but in that case it's his duty to let us know. I suppose you and he see each other sometimes?"

"By chance we have met to-day."

"By chance? I thought you were always meeting. Well, what does he mean? I acknowledge," said Spears, with very conscious satire, "that a Sir Paul in our band will be an oddity. It wouldn't be much more wonderful if it was St. Paul," he added, with a laugh; "but one way or other I must know. And I don't mind confessing to you," he said, turning into the way by which Fairfax seemed to be walking, and suddenly striking him on the shoulder with an amicable but not slight blow, "that it will be a disappointment. I had rather committed the folly of setting my heart on that lad. He was the kind of thing, you know, that we mean in our class when we say a gentleman. There's you, now, you're a gentleman, too; but I make little account of you. You might just as well have been brought up in my shop or in trade. But there's something about Paul, mind you—that's where it is; he's got that grand

air, and that hot-headed way. I hate social distinctions, but he's above them. The power of money is to me like a horrible monster, but he scorns it. Do you see what I mean? A man like me reasons it all out, and sees the harm of it, and the devilry of it, and it fires his blood. But Paul, he holds his head in the air, and treats it like the dirt below his feet. That's fine, that takes hold of the imagination. I don't mean to hurt your feelings, Fairfax," said Spears, giving him another friendly tap on the shoulder, "but you're just a careless fellow, one thing doesn't matter more than another to you."

"Quite true. I am not offended," said Fairfax, laughing. "You discriminate very well, Spears, as you always do."

"Yes, I suppose I have a knack that way," said the demagogue, simply. "I shouldn't wonder," he added, "though it is not a subject that a man can question his daughter about, that it was just the same thing that attracted my girl."

Fairfax turned round upon him with quick surprise; he had not heard anything about Janet. "What!" he said, "has Markham——" and then paused; for Spears, though indulgent to freedom of speech, was in this one point a dangerous person to meddle with. He turned round, with all the force of his rugged features and broad shoulders, and looked the questioner in the face.

"Yes," he said, "Markham has—a fancy for my Janet. There is nothing very wonderful in that. His mother tried to persuade me that this was the entire cause of his devotion to my principles and me. But that is a way women have. They think nothing comparable to their own influence. He satisfied me as to that. Yes," said Spears, with a softened, meditative tone, "that is the secondary motive I spoke of; and, to tell the truth, when I heard of the old fellow's death I was sorry. I said to myself, the girl will never be able to resist the temptation of being 'my lady.'"

A smile began to creep about the corners of his mouth. For himself, it is very likely that Spears would have had virtue enough to carry out his own principles and resist all bribes of rank had they been thrown in his way; but he contemplated the possible elevation of his child with a tender sense of the wonderful, and the ludicrous, and incredible which melted all sterner feelings. The idea that Janet might be "my lady" filled him with a subdued pleasure and amusement, and a subtle pride which veiled itself in the humour of the notion. It made him smile in spite of himself. As for Fairfax, this had so completely taken his breath away that he seemed beyond the power of speech, and Spears went on musingly for a minute or two walking beside him, his active thoughts lulled by the fantastic pleasure of that vision, and the smile still lingered about his closely-shut lips. At last he started from the weakness of this reverie.

"There is to be a meeting to-night," he said, "down in one of these streets—and I'm going to give them an address. I've got the name of the street here in my pocket and the house and all that—if you like to come."

"Certainly I will come," said Fairfax with alacrity. He had not much to occupy his evenings, and he took a kind of careless speculative interest, not like Paul's impassioned adoption of the scheme and all its issues, in Spears's political crusade. The demagogue patted him on the shoulders once more as he left him. He had always half-patronised, half stood in awe of Fairfax, whose careless humour sometimes threw a passing light of ridicule even on the cause. "If you see Markham, bring him along with you; and tell him I must understand what he means," he said.

But Fairfax did not see Paul again. He did not indeed put himself in the way of Paul, though his mind was full of him, for the rest of the day. Janet Spears was a new complication in Paul's way. The whole situation was dreary and hopeless enough. His

position as head in his house and family, the importance, his wealth, his power of influencing others, all taken from him in a day, and Spears's daughter—Janet Spears—hung round his neck like a millstone. Paul! of all men in the world to get into such a vulgar complication, Paul was about the last. And yet there could be no mistake about it. Fairfax, who honestly felt himself Paul's inferior in everything, heard this news with the wondering dismay of one whose own thoughts had taken a direction as much above him (he thought) as the other's was beneath him. With a painful flush of bewilderment, he thought of himself floated up into regions above himself into a different atmosphere, another world, by means of the woman who had been Paul's companion all his life, while Paul—— He had heard of such things; of men falling into the mire out of the purest places, of rebellions from the best to the worst. They were common enough. But that it should be *Paul*!

When evening came he took his way to the crowded quarter where he had met Spears, and to the meeting, which was held in a back room in an unsavoury street. It had begun to rain, the air was wet and warm, the streets muddy, the floor of the room black and stained with many footsteps. There was a number of men packed together in a comparatively small space, which soon became almost insupportable with the flaring gas-lights, the odour from their damp clothes, and their breath. At one end of it were a few men seated round a table, Spears among them. Fairfax could only get in at the other end, and close to the door, which was the saving of him. He exercised politeness at a cheap cost by letting everybody who came penetrate further than he. Some of the men looked at him with suspicion. He had kept on his morning dress, but even that was very different from the clothes they wore. They were not very penetrating in respect to looks, and some of them thought him a policeman in plain clothes. This

was not a comfortable notion among a number of hot-blooded men. Fairfax, however, soon became too much interested in the proceedings to observe the looks that were directed to himself. There was a good deal of commonplace business to be gone through first—small subscriptions to pay, some of which were weekly; little books to produce, with little sums marked; reports to be given in, on here and there a wavering member, a falling back into the world, a new convert. It looked to Fairfax at first like a parochial meeting about the little charities of the parish, the schools, and the almshouses. Perhaps organisation of every kind has its inherent vulgarities. This movement felt grand, heroic, to the men engaged in it, how much above the curate and his pennies who could say; but it seemed inevitable that it should begin in the same way.

The walls were roughly plastered and washed with a dingy tone of colour. The men sat on benches which were very uncomfortable, and showed all the independent curves of backs which toil had not straightened, the rough heads and dingy clothes. Over all this the gas flickered, unmitigated even by the usual glass globe. There was a constant shuffling of feet, a murmur of conversation, sometimes the joke of a privileged wit whispered about with earthquakes of suppressed laughter. For the men, on the whole, suppressed themselves with the sense of the dignity of a meeting and the expectation of Spears's address. "He's a fellow from the North, ain't he?" Fairfax heard one man say. "No, he's a miner fellow." "He's one of the cotton spinners." While another added authoritatively, "None of you know anything about it. It's Spears the delegate. He's been sent about all over the place. There's been some talk of sending him to Parliament." "Parliament! I put no faith in Parliament." "No more do I." "Nor I," the men said. "And yet," said the first speaker, "we've got no chance of getting our rights till they've got a lot like him there."

At this moment one of the men at the table rose, and there was instant silence. The lights flared, the rain rained outside with a persistent swish upon the pavement, the restless feet shuffled upon the floor, but otherwise there was not a sound to interrupt the stillness. This was somewhat tried, however, by the reading of a report, still very like a missionary report in a parish meeting. There was a good deal about an S. C. and an L. M. who had been led to think of higher principles of political morality by the action of the society, and who had now finally given in their adhesion. The meeting greeted the announcement of these new members by knocking with their boot-heels upon the floor. Then some one else got up and said that the prospects of the society were most hopeful, and that the conversion of L. C. and S. M. were only an earnest of what was to come. Soon the whole mass of the working classes, as already its highest intelligence, would be with them. The meeting again applauded this "highest intelligence." They felt it in themselves, and they liked the compliment. "Mr. Spears will now address the meeting," the last speaker said, and then this confused part of the proceeding came to an end, and everything became clear again when Spears spoke.

And yet Fairfax thought, looking on, it was by no means clear what Spears wanted, or wished to persuade the others that they wanted. Very soon, however, he secured their attention which was one great point; the very feet got disciplined into quiet, and when a late member came down the long passage which led straight into this room, there was a universal murmur and hush as he bustled in. Spears stood up and looked round him, his powerful square shoulders and rugged face dominating the assembly. He took a kind of text for his address, "not from the Bible," he said, "which many of you think out of date," at which there was a murmur, chiefly of assent; "mind you," said the orator, "I don't; that's a subject on which I'm free to keep my

private opinion ; but the other book you'll allow is never out of date. It's from the sayings of a man that woke up out of the easy thoughts of a lad, the taking everything for granted as we all do one time or another, to find that he could take nothing for granted, that all about was false, horrible, mean, and *sham*. That was the worst of it all—*sham*. He found the mother that bore him was a false woman and the girl he loved hid his enemy behind the door to listen to what he was saying, and his friends, the fellows he had played with, went off with him on a false errand, with letters to get him killed, 'There's something rotten,' says he 'in this State of Denmark—' that was all the poor fellow could get out at first, 'something rotten;' ay, ay, Prince Hamlet, a deal that was rotten. We're not fond of princes, my friends," said Spears, stopping short with a gleam of humour in his face, "but Shakspeare lived a good few years ago, and hadn't found that out. We've made a great many discoveries since his day."

At this the feet applauded again, but there was a little doubtfulness upon the faces of the audience who did not see what the speaker meant to be at.

" 'There's something rotten in the state of Denmark,' that's what he said. He didn't mean Denmark any more than I mean Clerkenwell. He meant this life he was living in, where the scum floated to the top, and nothing was what it seemed. That was Hamlet's quarrel with the world, and it's my quarrel, and yours, and every thinking man's. It was a grand idea, my friends, to make a government, to have a king. Yes, wait a bit till I've finished my sentence. I tell you it was a noble idea," said the orator, raising his voice, and cowing into silence half a dozen violent contradictions, "to get hold of the best man and set him him up there to help them that couldn't help themselves, to make the strong merciful and the weak brave. That was an idea ! I honour the man that invented it whoever he was ; but I'd lay you all a fortune if I had it, I'd

wager all I'm worth (which isn't much) that whoever the first king was, that was made after he had found out the notion, it wasn't he! And it was a failure, my lads," said Spears.

At this there was a tumult of applause. "I don't see anything to stamp about for my part," he said shaking his head. "That gives me no pleasure. It was a grand idea, but as sure as life they took the wrong man, and it was a failure. And it has always been a failure and always will be—so now there's nothing for it but to abolish kings——"

The rest of the sentence was lost in wild applause.

"But the worst is," continued the speaker, "that we've done that practically for a long time in England, and we're none the better. Instead of one bad king we've got Parliament, which is a heap of bad kings. Men that care no more for the people than I care for that fly. Men that will grind you, and tax you, and make merchandise of you, and neglect your interest and tread you down to the ground. Many is the cheat they've passed upon you. At this moment you cheer me when I say down with the kings, but you look at one another and you raise your eyebrows when I say down with the parliament. You've got the suffrage and you think that's all right. The suffrage! what does the suffrage do for you? It's another sham, a little stronger than all the rest. They'll give more of you, and more of you the suffrage, till they let in the women (I don't say a word against that. Some of the women have more sense than you have, and the rest you can always whop them) and the babies next for anything I can tell. And it will all be rotten, rotten, rotten to the core. And then a great cry will rise out of this poor country, and it will be Hamlet again," cried the orator, pouring out the full force of his great melodious voice from his broad chest—"Oh, cursed spite, that ever I was born to set it right!"

There was a feeble stamp or two upon the floor; but the audience, though curious and impressed, were not

up to the level of the speaker, and did not know what to make of him. He saw this, and he changed his tone.

"I read the other day of the kind of parliament that was a real parliament of the people. Once every two months the whole population met in a great square; and there they were asked to choose the men that were to govern them. They voted all by word of mouth—no ballot tickets in those days—for there was not one of them that was afraid to give his opinion. They chose their men for two months, no more. They were men that were known to all the place that had been known from their cradles; no strangers there, but men they could lay their hands on if they went wrong. It was for two months only, as I tell you, and then the parliament came together again, and the men they had chosen gave an account of what they had done. In my opinion—I don't know what you may think—that was as perfect a plan of government, and as true a rule of the people as ever existed on this globe. Who is that grumbling behind there? If it is you, Paul Markham, stand up like a man and say what you've got to say."

There was a pause for a moment, and everybody looked round; but as no reply was made, the hearers drowned all attempts at opposition in a tumult of stamping feet and approving exclamations. "That was something like," they cried. And "Go on. Go on! Bravo, Spears!"

"Ah, yes. You say 'Bravo, Spears!' because I humour you. But that young fellow there at the back, I know what he meant to say. It was all rotten, rotten, rotten to the core; that peoples' parliament was the greatest humbug that ever was seen; it was the instrument of tyrants; it was the murderer of freedom; there was nothing too silly, nothing too wicked for it; its vote was a sham, and its wisdom was a sham. Ah! you don't cry 'Bravo, Spears!' any more. The reason of all this is that we never get hold of the right men,

I don't know what there is in human nature that makes it so. I have studied it a deal, but I've never found that out. The scum gets uppermost, boils up and sticks on the top. That's my experience. The less honest a man is, the more sure he is to get up to the top. I don't speak of being born equal like some folks; but I think every man has a right to his share of the place he's born in—a right to have his portion wherever he is. One man with another, our wants are about the same. One eats a little more, one drinks a little more (and we all do more of that than is good for us), than the rest. But what we've got a right to is our share of what's going. Instead of great estates, great parks, grand palaces where those who call themselves our masters live and starve us, we have a right, every man, to enough of it to live on, to enough——”

Here the speaker was interrupted by the clamour of the cheering. The men rose up and shouted; they drowned his voice in the enthusiasm of their delight. Paul had come in behind after Spears began to speak. Though there had been in him a momentary movement of offence when he saw Fairfax, yet he had ended by remaining close to him, not seated, however, by leaning against the doorway in the sight of all. And it was likewise apparent in the sight of all that he was dressed, not like Fairfax in morning clothes, which offered a less visible contrast with the men surrounding him, but in evening dress, only partially covered by his light overcoat. He had come indeed to this assembly met to denounce all rights of the aristocrat, in the very livery of social superiority. Fairfax, who was anxious about the issue, could not understand what it meant. Paul's eyes were fixed upon Spears, and there was a half smile and air of something that might be taken for contempt on his face.

The applause went to the orator's head. He plunged into violent illustrations of his theory, by the common instances of riot, impurity, extravagance, debt, and

general wickedness which were to be found in what were called the higher classes. Perhaps Spears himself was aware that his arguments would not bear a very close examination: and the face of his disciple there before him, the face which had hitherto glowed with acquiescence, flushed with indignation, answered every appeal he made, but which was now set, pale, and impassive, without any response at all, with indeed an evident determination to withstand him—filled him with a curious passion. He could not understand it, and he could not endure to see Paul standing there, Paul, his son in the faith, his disciple of whom he was unconsciously more proud than of all the other converts he had made, with that air of contradiction and defiance. The applause excited him and this tacit opposition excited him still more. Fairfax had produced no such effect upon the demagogue; he had been but a half believer at the best, a critic more interested than convinced. He was one of those whom other men can permit to look on, from whom they can accept sympathy without concurrence, and tolerate dissent. But with Paul the case was very different. Every glance at him inflamed the mind of Spears. Was it possible (the idea flashed across his mind in full torrent of his speech) that this beloved disciple was lost to him? He would not believe it, he would not permit it to be; and with this impulse he flung forth his burning accusations, piled up sham and scandal upon the heads of aristocrats, represented them as standing in the way of every good undertaking, of treading down the poor on every side, of riding roughshod everywhere over liberties and charities alike, robbers of their brethen, destroyers of their fellow-creatures. And as every burning period poured forth, the noise, the enthusiasm became indescribable. The men who listened were no more murderous rebels than English landlords and millionaires are sanguinary oppressors, but they shouted and stamped, and rent their throats with applause, all the more that they were well acquainted with these

arguments. Hamlet and "the cursed spite" of his position were of doubtful interest; but here was something which they understood. Thus they went on together, mutually exciting each other, the speaker and the listeners—until suddenly in the midst of the hubbub a strange note, a new voice, struck in, and caught them all in full uproar.

"What's that?" cried Spears, with the quick hearing of offended affection. "You behind there—some one spoke."

The men all turned round—the entire assembly—to see what the interruption was. Then they saw, leaning carelessly against the wall, his grey overcoat open, showing the expanse of fine linen, the silk lapels of the evening coat in which Paul had chosen to array himself, the young aristocrat, looking his part to the fullest perfection, with scorn on his face, and proud indifference, careless of them and their opinions. The mere sight of him brought an impulse of fierce hostility.

"I said, that's not so," said Paul, distinctly, throwing his defiance over all their heads at his old instructor. Spears was almost beside himself with pain and passion.

"Do you give me the lie," he said, "to my face—you, Paul? Oh, you shall have your title—that's the meaning of the change! you, Sir Paul Markham, baronet,—Do you give me the lie?"

"If you like to take it so, Spears. You know as well as I do that men are not monsters like that in one rank and heroes in another. Title or no title, that's the truth, and you know it—whatever those men that take in everything you are saying may think. You know that's not so."

The excited listeners saw Spears grow pale and wince. Then he shouted out with an excited voice—

"And that's a lie whoever said it. I! say one thing and mean another! The time has been when a man that said that to me would have rued it. He would have rued it——"

"And he shall rue it!" said a voice in the crowd.

The people turned round with a common impulse. Fairfax, when he saw what was coming, had risen too, and thrown himself in front of Paul. He was not so tall a man, and Paul's dark hair towered over his light locks. He tried to push him out into the narrow-flagged passage, and called to him to go—to go! But Paul's blood was up; he stood and faced them all, holding his arm before him in defence against the raised fists and threatening looks. "I'm one against a hundred," he said, perfectly calm. "You can do what you please. I will not give in, whatever you do. I tell you what Spears says is not true."

And then the uproar got up again and raged round them. There was a hesitation about striking the first blow. Nobody liked to begin the onslaught upon one single man, or a man with but one supporter. Fairfax got his arm into his, and did his best to push and drag him away into the paved passage. But it was not till Spears himself, breaking through the angry crowd, gave him a thrust with his powerful arm that he yielded. What might have happened even then, Fairfax did not know; for the passage was narrow, and the two or three people hanging about the door sufficed to make another angry crowd in their way. While, however, he was pushing his way along by the wall, doing all he could to impel before him Paul's reluctant figure, a door suddenly opened behind them, a light flashed out, and some one called to them to come in. Paul stumbled backwards, fortunately, over the step, and was thus got at a disadvantage; and in two minutes more Fairfax had struggled in, bringing his companion with him. The place into which they were admitted was a narrow passage, quite dark—and the contrast from the noise and crowd without to this silence bewildered the young men. Even then, however, the voice of Spears reached them over the murmur of the crowd.

"There's a specimen for you!" cried the orator, with a harsh laugh. "The scum come uppermost! What

did I tell you? that, take what pains you like, you never get the right man. I loved that lad like my son; and all I said was gospel to him. But he has come into his title, he has come into the land he swore he never would take from the people, and there's the end. Would you like a better proof of what I said? Oh, rotten, rotten, rotten to the core!"

CHAPTER XXXV.

THEY were in a small, dingy room, lighted with one feeble candle—still within hearing of the tumult close by. Paul had twisted his foot in the stumble, which was the only thing that had saved him from a scuffle and possible fight. He was paler than before with the pain. He had put his foot up upon a chair at Fairfax's entreaty, who feared a sprain; but himself, in his excitement, did not seem to feel it.

"My title and my lands!" he said, with a laugh which was more bitter than that of Spears. "You heard him, Fairfax. I've come into my property; that is what has caused this change in my opinions."

"Never mind, the man's a fool," said Fairfax angrily.

"He is not a fool," said Paul, "but it shows how well you can judge a man when you do not know his circumstances."

Fairfax, however, it must be owned, was as much puzzled as Spears. What was it that had caused the change? It was not much more than a month since Paul's devotion to Spears and his scheme had kept him from his father's death-bed. He had been intent then on giving up his whole life to the creed which this evening he had publicly contradicted in the face of its excited supporters. Fairfax could not make out what it

meant any more than the deserted demagogue could. If Paul, indeed, had reached the high top-gallant of his fortunes—if he had held the control of a large property in his hands—a position like that of a prince—there might have been reason in such a change of faith. Though it gave a certain foundation for Spears's bitter sneer, yet there was reason in it. A young man might very well be justified in abandoning the society of revolutionaries, when he himself entered the ranks of those who are responsible for the safety of the country and have a great deal to lose. But he did not understand Paul's position now, and a change so singular bewildered him. It was not, however, either necessary or expedient to enter into that question; and he addressed himself with more satisfaction to rubbing the injured ankle. He had asked the woman who admitted them, and who was in great terror of "the meeting," to get a cab, but had been answered that she dared not leave the house, and that they must not think of leaving the house till all was over in the "Hall." It was not a cheerful prospect. To his surprise, however, Paul showed less impatience than he did. He was full of the place and the discussion they had just left.

"He is no fool," Paul said, "that is the most wonderful of all. A man may go on telling a pack of lies for years, and yet be as true in himself as all the rest is false. I understand your looks, Fairfax. You think I have gone as far as most men."

"Keep your foot still, my good fellow," was all Fairfax said.

"That is all very well; you want an explanation of my conduct," said Paul. "You want to know what this inconsistency means; for it is inconsistency. Well, then, there's just this, that I don't mean to tell. I am as free as another man to form my own opinions, I hope."

"Hark! they're cheering again," said Fairfax. "What fellows they are to cheer! He has got them into a good humour. They looked savage enough half

an hour ago. It's a little absurd, isn't it, that you and I, Paul, who have been considered very advanced in our political opinions, should be in a kind of hiding here?"

"Hiding! I will go back at once and make my profession of faith," cried Paul; but when he sprang up to carry out his intention, the pain of his foot overpowered him. "Have I sprained it, do you think?—that is an affair of four or five weeks," he said, with a look of dismay.

After this very little passed. They sat on each side of the little deal table with the coarse candle sputtering between them, and listened to the hoarse sounds of the voices, the tumultuous applause on the other side of the wall. This was still going on, though in subdued tones, when the door suddenly opened. It was not easy at first to see who had come in, till Spears's face appeared over the flickering light. It was angry and dark, and overclouded with something like shame.

"I am glad you are here still, you two," he said in subdued tones.

Neither of the young men spoke. At last Fairfax, who was not the one on whom his eyes were bent, said—

"We were waiting till the meeting was over. Till then, it appears, we can't have a cab sent for. Markham has hurt his foot."

"Good Lord! How did he do that?" Spears came round and looked at it where it lay supported on the chair. He looked as if he would have liked to stroke and pet the injured limb like a child. "I hope it was none of those fellows with their pushing and stupid folly," he said.

"It was not done by any refinement of politeness, certainly."

These were the first words Paul had said, and they were uttered with the same half mocking smile.

"They're rough fellows, that's the truth," said Spears; "and they have an idiot for a guide," he went

on in a low voice. "Look here, Paul, you aggravated me with those grand looks of yours, and that sneer. You know as well as I do what puts me out. When it's a fellow I care for, I can't stand it. All the asses in Rotten Row might come and haw-haw at me, and I shouldn't mind; but you! that are a kind of child of my soul, Paul!"

"I hope your other children will get more mercy from you, then," said Paul, without looking at him. "You have not had much for me, Spears."

"I, lad? What have I ever done but cherish you as if you were my own! I have been as proud of you—! All your fine ways that I've jibed about have been a pleasure to me all the time. It went to my heart to think that you, the finest aristocrat of all the lot, were following old Spears for love of a principle. I said to myself, abuse them as we like, there's stuff in these old races—there's something in that blue blood. I don't deny it before you two, that may laugh at me as you please. I that have just been telling all those lads that it's the scum that comes uppermost (and believe it too). I that have sworn an eternal war against the principle of unequal rank and accumulation of property—"

Spears paused. There was nothing ludicrous to him in the idea of this eternal war, waged by a nameless stump orator against all the kingdoms of the world and the power of them. He was too much in earnest to be conscious of any absurdity. He was as serious in his crusade as if he had been a conqueror with life and death in his hands, and his voice trembled with the reality of this confession which he was going to make.

"Well!" he said, "I, of whom you know all this as well as I do myself, I've been proud of your birth and your breeding, Paul, because it was all the grander of you to forget them for the cause. I've dwelt on these things in my mind. I've said, there's the flower of them all, and he's following after me! Look here! you're not going to take it so dreadfully amiss if, after

not hearing a word from you, after not knowing what you were going to do, seeing you suddenly opposite to me with your most aggravating look (and you can put on an aggravating look when you like, you know you can, and drive me wild," Spears said with a deprecating, tender smile, putting his hand, caressingly, on the back of Paul's chair)—"if I let out a bitter word, a lash of ill-temper against my will, you are not going to make that a quarrel between you and me."

The man's large mobile features were working, his eyes shining out under their heavy brows. The generous soul in him was moved to its depth. He had, being "wild," as he said, with sudden passion, accused Paul of having yielded to the seductions of his new rank—but in his heart he did not believe the accusation he had made. He trusted his young disciple with all the doting confidence of a woman. Of a woman! his daughter Janet, though she was a woman, and a young one, had no such enthusiasm of trust in her being. She would have scorned his weakness had she been by—very differently would Janet have dealt with a hesitating lover. But the demagogue had enthroned in his soul an ideal to which, perhaps, his very tenderest affections, the deepest sentiments he was capable of, had clung. He had fallen for the moment into that madness which works in the brain when we are wroth with those we love. And he did not know now how to make sufficient amends for it, how to open wide enough that window into his heart which showed the quivering and longing within. But he had said for the moment all he could say.

And for a time there was silence in the little room. Fairfax, who understood him, turned away, and began to stare at a rude-coloured print on the wall in order to leave the others alone. He would himself have held out his hand before half this self-revelation had been made, and perhaps Spears would have but lightly appreciated that naïve response. But Paul was by no

means ready to yield. He kept silence for what seemed to the interested spectator ten minutes at least. Then he said, slowly—

"I think it would be wise to inquire into the facts of the case before permitting yourself to use such language, Spears—even if you had not roused your rabble against me."

He said these strident words in the most forcible way, making the r's roll.

"Rabble?" Spears repeated, with a tone of dismay; but his patience was not exhausted, nor his penitence. "I know," he said, "it was wrong. I don't excuse myself. I behaved like a fool, and it costs a man like me something to say that. Paul—come! why should we quarrel? Let bygones be bygones. They should have torn me to pieces before they had laid a finger on you."

"A good many of them would have smarted for it if they had laid a finger on me," said Paul. "That I promise you."

Spears laughed; his mind was relieved. He gave his vigorous person a shake and was himself again.

"Well, that is all over," he said. "It will be a lesson to me. I am a confounded fool at bottom after all. Whatever mental advantages you may have, that's what the best of us have to come to. My blood gets hot, and I lose my head. There's a few extenuating circumstances though. Have you forgotten, Paul, that we were to sail in October, and it's the 20th of September now? Not a word have I heard from you since you left Oxford, three weeks ago. What was I to think? I know what's happened in the meantime; and I don't say," said Spears, slowly, "that if you were to throw us overboard at the last moment, it would be a thing without justification. I told you at the time you would be more wise to let us alone. But you never had an old head on young shoulders. A generous heart never counts the cost in that way; still— And the time, my dear fellow, is drawing very near."

"I may as well tell you," said Paul, tersely, "I am not going with you, Spears."

The man sat firm in his chair as if he had received a blow, leaning back a little, pressing himself against the woodwork.

"Well!" he said, and kept upon his face a curious smile—the smile, and the effort alike, showing how deeply the stroke had penetrated. "Well!" he repeated, "now that I know everything—now you have told me—I don't know that I have a word to say."

Paul said nothing, and for another minute there was again perfect silence. Then Spears resumed—

"I thought as much," he said. "I have always thought it since the day you went away. A man understands that sort of thing by instinct. Well! it's a disappointment, I don't deny; but no doubt," said Spears, with a suppressed tone of satire in his voice, "though I've no experience of the duties of a rich baronet, nor the things it lays upon you, no doubt there's plenty to do in that avocation; and looking after property requires work. There's a thousand things that it must now seem more necessary to do than to start away across the Atlantic with a set of visionaries. I told you so at the beginning, Paul—or Sir Paul, I suppose I ought to say; but titles are not much in my way," he added, with a smile, "as you know."

"You may save yourself the trouble of titles here, for I am not Sir Paul, nor have I anything in the way of property to look after that will give me much trouble. It appears—" said Paul, with a smile that was very like that of Spears, which sat on his lips like a grimace, "it appears that I have an elder brother who is kind enough to relieve me from all inconvenience of that sort."

Spears turned to Fairfax with a look of consternation, as if appealing to him to guarantee the sanity of his friend.

"What does he mean?" he cried, bewildered.

"We need not go into all the question," said Paul. "Fairfax, haven't they got that cab yet? My foot's better—I can walk to the door, and these gentlemen seem to be dispersing. We need not enter into explanations. I'm not a rich baronet, that is about all. The scum has not come uppermost this time. You see you made a mistake in your estimate of my motives."

This time he laughed that harsh, bitter, metallic laugh which is one of the signs of nervous passion. He had such a superiority over his assailant as nothing else could have given him. And as for Spears, shame, and wonder, and distress, struck him dumb. He gasped for breath.

"My God!" he said; "and I to fall upon you for what had never happened, and taunt you with wealth when you were poor. Poor! are you actually poor, Paul?"

"What is the use of searching into it? the facts are as I have told you. I shan't starve," said the young man, holding his head high.

Spears looked at him with a mixture of grief and satisfaction, and held out a large hand.

"Never mind," he said, his face melting and working, and a smile of a very different character gleaming over it, "you would have been out of place with us if you had been Sir Paul; but come now, my lad, come now! It's not money we want, but men. Come with us, you'll be as welcome as the sunshine, though you have not a penny. For a rich man, I could see myself the incongruity; but for a poor man, what could be better than a new country and a fair field. Come! don't bear malice for a few hasty words that were repented of as soon as they were said. I would have scorned to say a word had you been kept back by your new grandeur. But now that you're disinherited—why, Paul, come—Australia is the place for such as you. Young and strong, with a good heart, and all the

world before you ! Why, there's a new country for you to get hold of, to govern, if you like. Come ! I'll not oppose any dignity you may gain out there ; and I tell you, you'll have the ball at your foot, and the whole world before you ! Come with us, I ask this time as a favour, Paul."

He had held out his hand with some wavering and doubt, though with enthusiasm. But gradually a curious expression of wonder came to his face ; his hand dropped at his side. Paul made no motion towards taking it ; the demagogue thought it was resentment. A flush of vivid colour came over him. "Come, this is a little too much for old friends," he said, getting up hastily from his chair, with a thrill of wounded feeling in his voice.

"Don't wrong him, Spears," said Fairfax. "He has had a great deal to bother him, and his foot is bad. You can meet another time and settle that. At present, let us get him out of this place. If he is angry, he has a right to be ; but never mind that now. Let us get him out of here."

Spears did not say another word. He stalked away into the house to which this room belonged, and the "hall" beyond it. It was a little tavern of the lower class in which he was living. By and by the woman came to say there was a cab at the door. And Paul limped out, leaning on Fairfax.

All was quiet outside, the meeting dispersed ; only one or two men sitting in the room down stairs, who cast a curious look upon the two young men, but took no further notice. As for Spears, he did not appear at all. He was lurking behind, his heart wrung with various feelings, but too much wounded, too much disappointed, too sore and sad to show himself. If Paul had seemed to require help, the rejected prophet was lingering in the hope of offering it ; but nothing of the kind seemed the case. He limped out holding Fairfax's arm. He did not even look round him as the other

did, or show any signs of a wish to see his former friend. Spears had not got through the world up to this time without mortification; but he had never suffered so acutely as now.

"Poor Spears," Fairfax contrived to say, as they jolted along, leaving the mean and monotonous streets behind them. "I think you might have taken his hand."

"Pshaw!" said Paul, "I am tired to death of all that. I don't mean to say he is not honest—far more honest than most of them—but what is the meaning of all that clap-trap? Why, Spears ought to know as well as any man what folly it is. Bosh!" said the young man with an expression of disgust. The milder spectator beside him looked at him with unfeigned surprise.

"I thought you went as far as he did, Markham. I thought you were out and out in your principles, accepting no compromise: I thought——"

"You thought I was a fool," said Paul, bitterly, "and you were right enough, if that is any satisfaction to you; but I had a lesson or two before my poor father's death—and more since. Don't let us speak of it. When a man has made an ass of himself, it is no pleasure to him to dwell upon it. And I am not free yet, and I don't know when I shall be," he cried, with an irrepressible desire for sympathy, then closed his mouth as if he had shut a book, and said no more.

Thus they went jolting and creaking over the wet pavements all gleaming with muddy reflections. London was grim and dismal under that autumn rain, no flashing of carriages about, or gleams of toilette, or signs of the great world which does its work under the guise of pleasure; only a theatre now and then in the glare of gas with idle people hanging about, keeping themselves dry under the porch; and afterward the great vacant rooms at the clubs with a vague figure scattered here and there, belated "men," or waiters at their ease;

the foot-passengers hurrying along under umbrellas, the cabs all splashed with mud, weary wayfarers and muddy streets. There was scarcely a word exchanged between them as they went along.

"Where are you living?" said Fairfax at last.

"The house is shut up," said Paul, giving the name of his hotel.

"But my place is not. Will you come with me and have your foot looked to? I wish you would come, Markham. There are heaps of things I want to say to you, and to ask you——"

Paul was in so fantastic and unreasonable a condition of mind that these last words were all that was necessary to alter his decision. He had thought he would go—why not?—and escape a little from all the contradictions in his own mind by means of his friend's company. But the thought of having to answer questions made an end of that impulse of confidence. He had himself taken to the hotel instead, where, he said to himself with forlorn pride, at least there was nobody to insist upon any account of his thoughts or doings, where he should be unmolested by reason of being alone.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE visit of Janet Spears had made a great impression upon Lady Markham. She abstained as long as she could from speaking of it to Alice, but what is there which a woman can keep from her closest companion, her daughter, who is as her own soul? Up to this moment Alice had known nothing whatever about Janet Spears, not even of her existence. Perhaps Lady Markham's discretion, and the painful sense that she had interfered injudiciously in Paul's affairs, might

not have sufficed to keep her secret; but Sir William's illness had carried the day over everything, and not a word had been said between the mother and daughter on this subject. Even now Lady Markham made a heroic effort. Full as was her mind of the visit, she kept it to herself for two long days, thinking over everything that had been said, and wondering if she had done as she ought, or if she should have been more kind to the girl whom (was it possible?) Paul loved, or more severe upon the creature who had enthralled him. At one time she thought of Janet in one way, at another in the other. The girl he loved (was it possible?), or the woman who had put forth evil arts and got him in her power. It is hard for a woman to be quite just to any one, male or female, who has injured her son: and people say it is hardest to be just, to a woman who has done so. [In this point I do not feel qualified to judge; but men say so who know women better, naturally, than they know themselves.] Lady Markham struggled very hard to be just: but it was difficult; and in a moment of pressure, when Alice came upon her suddenly, and with a soft arm round her and a soft cheek laid against hers, entreated to know if there was any fresh trouble—how could she help but tell her everything? Alice justified all vulgar sentiment on the subject by being triumphantly unjust.

"He must have been cheated into it," she cried. "Paul—*Paul!* so fastidious as he is, how could he ever, ever, have thought of a girl like that?"

But Lady Markham, anxious to keep the balance even, shook her head.

"My dearest, you don't know much about men. I can't tell why it is. They choose those whom you would think they would fly from, and fly from those whom you would think—I don't know, Alice, perhaps they get tired of the kind of women like you and me, whom they see every day."

"Mamma!"

"I have thought so often, dear. *We* don't feel so, but men—they get tired of one kind of woman. They think they will try something different. It has always been a mystery. And you must not think this was a—was not a good girl. I saw nothing wrong about her. Perhaps a little more——no, I don't know what to say. She was not saucy, or bold, or—— Perhaps it was only that she was not a lady," Lady Markham said with a sigh.

"But that Paul should care for any one who was not a lady," Alice said, clasping her hands together with mingled despair and impatience; and then she cried suddenly, "Poor little Dolly!"

"Dolly!" said Lady Markham. Nothing could exceed her surprise. The air of grieved doubt and hesitation which had been in her face while they discussed Janet gave way to lively astonishment and displeasure. "What do you mean by Dolly?" she said.

Then Alice faltered forth an ashamed confession—that she thought—that she had supposed—that she did not know anything about it—did not believe there was anything in it—but only, Dolly——

Nothing was to be made of this hesitating speech.

"Dolly," said Lady Markham, drawing herself up, "is a dear little girl. I am very fond of her. In her proper place she is charming; but my dear Alice, Dolly is scarcely more suitable for Paul, in his position. Ah!——"

Lady Markham stopped short and hid her face in her hands.

During the time that these conversations—the visit of Janet and all its attendant circumstances, and the explanation of it thus given to Alice—were going on, these ladies lived upon the post which brought frequent communications from the people in London who were carrying on such inquiries as could be made about the intruder into the family, he who had so suddenly and

decisively blighted all the prospects of Paul. Colonel Fleetwood wrote, and Mr. Scrivener, and Paul himself, though less frequently. The former was the only one that was hopeful; he was perfectly ready to believe that Gus was an impostor, and the whole thing "a got up affair." Was it likely, he argued, that Sir William, the most steady-going old fellow, could be guilty of such a tremendous mistake? Had it only been a wickedness! but it was such a folly, such an error in judgment. A statesman, a man in parliament, one of the rulers of the country, how could any one suppose him capable of a thing so foolish? Mr. Scrivener was far less confident. He knew what a lawyer's law was in his own private affairs, and he had not much more confidence in a statesman's wisdom. He had not sent any one to Barbadoes, but he was making careful inquiries among all sorts of people who knew—West Indian agents, ancient governors, and consuls. And he had heard of Gus from more than one of these referees, and found his story confirmed in all points as to his life in Barbadoes. About his connexion with Sir William Markham, these people did not know, but they gave him the highest character, and confirmed his statement in many important details. The lawyer did not conceal from Lady Markham his complete conviction. Neither did Paul, who had given up his own cause at once, though he dragged on in London, dancing attendance at the lawyer's office and hearing from day to day some fresh and, as he thought, unmeaning piece of additional proof. "Of course it is all right," Paul wrote; "I never for a moment doubted that the man was all right. He may be a cad, but he was speaking the truth. I stay here to-humour them; but I know very well that they will discover nothing which will shake his credit; and the best thing I can do is to get myself as soon as I can out of Sir Gus's way." This way of speaking of it was to both the ladies like turning the sword round in the wound. Where was it he meant to take himself, out of

the way? They had neither of them any clue to Paul's changed sentiments, and if he had vowed to go away while all was well with him, when he had fortune and splendour within reach, with those socialist emigrants whose very name was enough to alarm them, what would he do now when this horrible downfall and disappointment had loosed the bonds between him and his native country? A wild desire to call for help, even upon the least desirable of auxiliaries, upon Janet Spears herself, came to Lady Markham's mind. If the girl could keep him at home, she felt herself able to receive even Janet to her heart.

While their mother's mind was thus occupied, the two little girls had languidly resumed their lessons. It is no reproach to the children to say that it was not very long before the impression made by their father's death would have died out naturally, in an occasional tender recollection, or sudden burst of crying when something recalled him to their memory. It was not grief that made them languid, but the sense of something going on, a living agitation, and the shadow of a still greater disturbance to come. It was whispered vaguely between them that no doubt they would have to leave Markham, a thing which they sometimes felt like a deathblow and sometimes like a deliverance. When Bell and Marie thought of leaving their woods, their gardens, their "own house," in which they had been born, the desolation of the thought overwhelmed them; but when, on the other hand, they thought of going away, perhaps to London, perhaps "abroad," a thrill of guilty rapture ran through their bosoms. They had never come to such a pitch of wickedness as to say this to each other, but already in the rapid communion of the eyes each had guessed that the other thought there might be something to be said for such a possibility; and the idea made them restless, unable to settle to their work, and very trying to Mademoiselle, who, poor lady, had to put up with this reverberation of the

troubles of the house without really having any share in them, or taking any very lively interest in these family concerns. Sometimes she had a headache, caused, as she said, by nothing but the continued disturbance of her nerves through their endless rustlings and changes. And when this headache got very bad and Mademoiselle betook herself to bed, it cannot be said that her pupils were sorry. They put their books away (having been brought up in the strictest habits of tidiness), and hastened out to their favourite haunts. The air and the movement stilled their nerves, which were as much at fault as those of Mademoiselle. They were seated on, or rather in, a tree near the fishpond, the favourite centre of all their games when the next great event occurred to them. Bell had brought out a book with her, which she held embraced in her arms, but had not opened. She was seated well up in the tree, dangling her feet close to Marie's head, who was seated on a lower branch. Marie had no book—her tastes were not literary; and she was very near the edge of that great discovery which both had made, but neither avowed, that under some circumstances it might be "nice" to go away.

"Were you ever in a great big, big place—in a city, Bell?"

"You little silly, of course I have been in Farboro'. I have been with mamma a hundred times, and so have you."

"Farboro' is not what I mean. Farboro' is only a town. There are not so very many people in it, and the cathedral is the chief place. It is not noisy or wicked at all. I mean a great horrid place where there are crowds everywhere, and policemen, and where nobody goes to church. That is what they call a city in books. London is a city," said Marie.

"I have never been in London, you know. I wonder if we shall ever see it," said Bell. "I wonder if mamma will ever take us there. I wonder if you and I

will be quite different from Alice when we grow up. *She* has been presented. I wonder if it makes a difference when poor girls are like us—without any father,” she added, with a little choke of tears.

“Do you think we shall be poor?” said Marie. “There is not much difference now. We have all the same servants, and as much to eat, and Mademoiselle just the same.”

“It will not make any difference in what we have to eat,” said Bell, approaching the dangerous subject. “But—perhaps we may not be able to stay at Markham. Oh, Marie! what would you think if mamma were to give up Markham altogether and go away?”

Marie looked up with large eyes, stretching her neck, as her sister was at an elevation almost perpendicular. She said, in a tone of awe, “Oh, I don’t know! What would *you* think, Bell?”

Neither of the children liked to commit themselves. At length Bell, who felt that her superior age required of her that she should lead the way, assumed the privilege of her years. “I don’t know either,” she said, reflectively. “If it was in summer, when everything is bright, I should not like it at all; but if, perhaps,” she added, slower and slower, “it was in the rainy weather—when you can’t go out, when the grass is so wet you sink in it, when there is nothing but sleet and slush, and the trees drop cold drops upon you even when it’s not raining, and you get your frock all wet even in the avenue——”

Marie’s eyes opened bigger and bigger after every step of this hypothesis. She followed them with a movement of her lips and a gasp of excitement at the end.

“Then——” said Bell, “perhaps—I think—it might be rather nice, Marie.”

“Oh, Bell! that is what I sometimes thought—but I never liked to say it.”

“Nor me,” said Bell, more courageous, indifferent

to grammar—and going on with hardihood after she had made the first plunge. “There would be Madame Tussaud’s, and the Crystal Palace, and the British Museum, and Westminster Abbey, and all the bazaars. However bad the weather was, there would always be something. I dare say mamma would take us to the theatre.”

“But not just now,” said Marie. “It would not be nice to go just now. It would look as if we had forgotten——”

“Did I say *now*? At present it is only autumn, and everybody is in the country. But when the days get short and dark, and you have to light the candles directly—What is it?” cried Bell, for Marie had shaken herself off her branch, and, with a cry of dismay, stood looking apparently at something which was coming. “Is it Mademoiselle?” said the little girl under her breath.

Mademoiselle had a particular objection to that nest in the tree. Bell’s seat was one which was usually occupied by a boy, not one of the girls’ places, as Roland and Harry contemptuously called the lower branches. It required some ingenuity to clamber into it, and more to get down again—and not only ingenuity, but an absence of petticoats would have been desirable. Bell felt herself catching here and there as she tried to get down hastily. Then came the sound of a long rent, which sent her brain all whirling. Her new black frock! and what would nurse say? The idea of nurse and Mademoiselle both waiting, full of fury, for her descent, was enough to obscure the perceptions of any child. Her foot slipped from a mossy and treacherous twig; she caught wildly at something, she did not know what, and with a sudden whirr and whirl and blackness lost herself altogether for a moment. When she became aware of what was going on again, she found herself seated at the foot of the tree, staring across the fish-pond, with a lump on her forehead and a singing in her

ears. Marie was crying, bending over her, and saying, "Oh! what can we do—what shall I do? Do you think she will die, Mr. Gus?"

"Oh, what a little goose you are!" murmured Bell, gradually coming to herself. "What should I die for? I have only got a knock—on my head." She felt the lump on her forehead wonderingly as she spoke, for it hurt her, and nature directed her hand to the spot. "I have got a *dreadful* knock on my head," she added, not without satisfaction. Then Bell leaned back on something, she did not know what, and saw a hand come round from behind with a wet handkerchief to lay upon her forehead. The hand was a brown hand with a big ring on it, at which Bell vaguely wondered where she had seen it before. Then, all of a sudden, she jumped up, upon her feet, though she felt very queer and giddy. "It is that little gentleman! You have been talking to him, Marie!"

"And won't you talk to me, too?" said Gus, following her with his wet handkerchief. "Well, never mind, put on this. The water is out of your own fish-pond; it cannot do you any harm."

Bell was not able to resist, and he made her sit down again and have her forehead bathed. By degrees as she became aware of everything around her, Bell perceived that the little gentleman was very kind. His thin, brown hand touched her so gently, and he was not angry, though she had been angry. By and by she said, "I am better. Please, oh, please go away, Mr. Gus. I don't want to be disagreeable, but how can I have anything to say to you, when you have been so——"

"Yes, my dear," said Mr. Gus. "What have I been?" For Bell paused, not knowing what to say.

The little girl did not continue. She contented herself with throwing down Mr. Gus's wet handkerchief from her forehead, which was not so bad now. "You are our enemy," she said.

"I am nobody's enemy. I am your brother. I want to do everything I can for you, if you will let me. Don't you remember what friends we made, and how fond we were of each other before you knew who I was; and why should you hate me now you know I am your brother?" said Gus.

It was wonderful to see him standing there, so like their father: and it was very hard for two little girls to keep up an argument with a grown-up gentleman. But Bell, who had a great spirit, was not disposed to throw down her arms. She said, "Paul is my brother, and you are his enemy," feeling at last that she was on steady ground.

"I am no more Paul's enemy than I am yours. Now listen, little girls. If some one were to leave you something, Bell—if it was to be put in the will that this was for Sir William Markham's second daughter—how should you feel if it were taken from you and given to Marie?"

"I would not put up with it all," said Bell promptly. Then perceiving how she had committed herself, "It is not the same. It was Paul's, and you want to take it from Paul."

"But I am the heir, and not Paul," said the little gentleman. "I am the eldest. You are very fond of your little sister, but you would not give up what was yours to Marie."

This time Bell was more wise. "You don't know anything about it. What would it matter? for when anything is given to me, I always give half to Marie," she said, with sparkling eyes.

The little gentleman owned himself discomfited. "There you have the better of me," he said. "But I should like to give a great part to Paul. I would give him everything in reason. And I have come now to see you, to ask you to do me a very great favour."

They looked at him with eyes that grew bigger and bigger, and as Bell was very pale, with a lump on her

forehead, her aspect with her heroic gaze was tragical, to say the least. They were both greatly melted and softened by the idea of having a favour asked of them, and Marie, who was entirely gained over, did nothing but nudge and pull her sister's dress by way of recommending her to be merciful. Bell leant back upon the tree like a little image of Justice, with the bandage momentarily pushed off, but very much needed. It lay at her feet in the shape of Mr. Gus's white handkerchief; but all the severity, yet candour, of an entire Bench was in her eyes.

"I want you to make my peace with your mother. I want you to persuade her to stay at Markham; to let me stay here to; to let me live among you like your brother, which I am. If you all run away as soon as I come near the place, what good will it do me?" said Gus. "I want you all. When the boys come home, we should have all kinds of fun, and as for you, I should not let anyone bother you. Fancy, I have nobody belonging to me but you. You are my family. I am more like an old uncle than your brother, but I should be very fond of you all the same. If your mother would only listen to me, it would be very nice for us all. I am sure you can be generous, Bell. You are old enough to understand. And I think Alice would be on my side if she would hear what I have got to say."

"Alice would never be on your side," said Bell with decision. "Paul is Alice's brother—her particular brother—and how could she bear to see him put out? Don't you know we are all in pairs at Markham? Harry is my brother, and Roland is Marie's."

"Ye-es," said Marie tired of being left out, "but he is not always nice. He sends me away because I am a girl, as if it was my fault!"

"Well then," said Mr. Gus, "if Alice will not stand my friend, I must trust it all to you. The thing you must do is to go to your mamma, and tell her your old brother is outside, very sorry to be the cause of any

trouble, but that he can't help being your brother, and a great deal older than Paul. How could I help that? I did not choose who my father was to be; and tell her if she would only speak to me, I will explain it all to her. And there is nothing she can ask me to do that I will not do for Paul. And tell her—but I need not tell you, Bell, for I can see in your eyes that you know quite well what to say."

The conviction that she would indeed be a valuable and eloquent advocate got into Bell's mind as he went on. Yes, she felt she could say all that to mamma and better than Mr. Gus had said it. She would use such arguments that Lady Markham would be sure to yield. Bell was aware that she was clever, and all her own opposition melted away in the delightful mental excitement of this immense undertaking. She forgot the lump on her forehead, the buzzing in her ears, and even more, she forgot the family opposition to the interloper who was taking away Paul's birthright. "Oh yes, I know very well what to say," she cried with a change of sentiment which was as complete as it was rapid, and in her excitement she set off at once for the house, framing little speeches as she went, in which the case of Gus should be put forth with all the devices of forensic talent. Oh what a pity I am not a boy! was the thought which flew through her mind as on the sudden gale of inspiration which swept through her. For the moment, perhaps, this fact, which would for ever prevent her from being a special pleader by profession, was a decided advantage to Bell. Little Marie did not like to be left behind. She looked wistfully after her sister, then she said, "I will tell mamma too," and rushed after Bell. Finally, Mr. Gus himself completed the procession walking behind them. He had chosen no unfit ambassadors of peace, though the elder emissary looked very much as if she had been in the wars. And the little man walked after them with a little tremor, varying the calm of self-satisfaction which usually

reigned in his bosom. He knew he was doing what was by far the best and most Christian thing to do, and he felt that he had managed it very cleverly in putting his cause into such hands. But notwithstanding these consolatory reflections, and notwithstanding the natural calm of his bosom, it is certain that Mr. Gus felt in that bosom an unaccustomed quiver of timidity which might almost have been called fear.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

GUS came into the hall with Bell and Marie, and waited there while they proceeded to plead his cause within. He walked about the hall softly, and looked at the pictures, the old map of the county, and other curiosities that were there. These things beguiled his anxiety about his reception, and filled him with an altogether novel interest. A thing which is quite indifferent to us while it belongs to our neighbour, gains immediate attraction when it becomes our own. He looked at everything with interest, even the cases of stuffed birds that decorated one corner. Then he came and seated himself in the great bamboo chair in which he had sat down the first time he came to Markham. It was not very long ago, not yet two months, but what a difference there was! Then, indeed, he had been anxious about his reception, and he was anxious about his reception now. But when he came first, he had been doubtful of his position altogether, not sure what his rights were, or what claim he could make—and now his anxieties were merely sentimental, and his rights all established. He sat where he had sat then, and saw everything standing just as he had seen it, the trees the same, except in colour, nothing altered except himself. Now it was all his, this noble domain. He had not known what welcome he might receive, whether his

father would acknowledge him, or what would happen: and now his father's possessions were his, and no one could infringe his rights. How strange it was! He sat sunk in the great bamboo chair, and listened to the faint sound of voices which he heard through the open door, the two little girls pleading his cause. He was very desirous that they should be successful, for if he was not successful, Markham would be a dull house—but still, successful or not, nothing any longer could affect him vitally. A poor stranger, a wanderer from the tropics, unused to England and English ways, with not much money, and a very doubtful prospect before him, he had been when he first came here. How could he help smiling at the change? He had no desire to do any one harm. All the evil that he had done was involuntary, but it could not be expected that he would give up his rights. He felt very much at his ease as he seated himself in that chair, notwithstanding the touch of anxiety in his mind. The prospect which was before him was enough to satisfy an ambitious man, but Gus was not ambitious. Indeed, the advantages he had gained were contracted in his eyes by his own inability fully to understand their extent. They were greater than he was aware, greater than his imagination could grasp. But, at least, they included everything that his imagination was able to grasp, and mortal man cannot desire more.

Bell had gone in very quietly, inspired by her mission, without pausing to think, and Marie had followed, as Marie always did. They went straight into the room where they were sure, they thought, of seeing their mother. It was in the recess, the west chamber, at the end of the drawing room, that they found her. But the circumstances did not seem very favourable to their plea. Lady Markham and Alice were reading a letter together, and Alice, it was very apparent, was crying over her mother's shoulder, while Lady Markham was very pale and her eyes red as if she had shed tears.

"It is all over then," she was saying as the children came in, folding the letter up to put it away. And Alice cried, and made no reply. This checked the straightforward fervour of Bell, who had walked straight into the room and halfway up its length before she discovered the state of affairs. "Mamma," she had begun, "I have come from——" Then Bell paused, and cried, "Oh, mamma, dear, what is the matter?" with sudden alarm, stopping short in mid-career.

"Nothing very much," said Lady Markham, "nothing that we did not know before. What is it, Bell? You may tell me all the same. We must face it, you know. We must not allow ourselves to be overcome by it," she said with a little quiver of her lip, and a smile which made the little girls inclined to cry too.

"Oh mamma! I just came from—him," Bell stopped short again, feeling as if involved in a sort of treason, and her pale little countenance flushed. Only then Lady Markham perceived the state in which the child was.

"What have you been doing to yourself, Bell? You have hurt yourself. You have got a blow on the forehead. What was it? Let me look at you. You have been up in one of those trees."

"Oh mamma," cried Bell, finding in this the very opportunity she wanted, "I fell, and I think I might have killed myself: but all at once, I don't know where he came from, I never saw him coming, there was the—little gentleman! He picked me up, and he spoiled all his handkerchief bathing my forehead. He was very kind, he always was very kind—to us children," said Bell.

"Oh Bell! how can you speak of that odious little man? how can you bother mamma about him? We have heard a great deal too much about him already," cried Alice with an indignation that dried her tears.

"It is not his fault," said Lady Markham, "we must be just. What could we do but what he has done? If

we had known of it all along, we should never have thought of blaming him—and it is not his fault that it all burst upon us in a moment. It was not his fault," she said, shaking her head, "but you must not think I blame your dear papa. He meant it for the best. I can see how it all happened as distinctly—At first he thought it would wound me to hear that he had been married before. And then—he forgot it altogether. You must remember how young he was, and what is a baby to a man? He forgot about it. I can see it all so plainly. The only thing is my poor Paul!" And here, after her defence of his father, the mother broke down too.

"Mamma," said Bell, "oh, don't cry, please don't cry! That is exactly what he says. He says he will do anything you like to tell him. He says he never wanted to do any harm. He is as sorry—as sorry! But how could he help being born, and being old—so much older than Paul? He says he is very fond of us all. He does not mind what he does if you will only let him come home and be the eldest brother. Mamma," said Bell, solemnly, struck with a new idea, "he must have saved my life, I think. I might have broken my neck, and there was nobody but Marie to run and get assistance. It was a very good thing for me that he was there. If he had not been there, you would have had—only five children instead of six," Bell said, with a gulp, swallowing the lump in her throat. She thought she saw herself being carried along all white and still, and the thought overcame her with a sense of the pathos of the possible situation. She seemed to hear all the people saying, "Such a promising child and cut off in a moment;" and "Poor Lady Markham! just after her other great grief;" so that Bell could scarcely help sobbing over herself, though she had not been killed.

"Oh Bell! it was not so bad as that! how could you be killed coming down head over heels from the old tree?" cried Marie, almost with indignation.

Lady Markham had satisfied herself in the meantime that the lump on the forehead was more ugly than serious.

"Let us be very glad you have not suffered more," she said. "But, Bell, the right thing would be not to climb up there again."

"Mamma, the right thing would be, if you care about me, at least, to let poor Mr. Gus come in, and thank him for saving my life. Oh, let him come in, mamma! How could he help being older than Paul? I dare say he would rather have been younger if he could; and I am sure by what he says he would give Paul anything—anything! to make it up to him, and to make friends with you. He says how miserable he would be if you left him here all alone. He could not bear to be down here thinking he had turned us out. Oh, if you had only seen him! he looked as if he could cry—Ask Marie. And he wanted to know if he might speak to Alice, if Alice would speak for him. But I said I didn't think it, because Paul was Alice's particular brother, and she could not bear anything that was hard upon him; and then he said," cried Bell, with unconscious embellishment, "'You are my two little sisters, oh, go and plead for me! Say I will do anything—anything—whatever she pleases.'" Oh mamma! who could say more than that? He has nobody belonging to him, unless we will let him belong to us. He is a poor little gentleman, not young, nor nice-looking, nor clever, nor anything. And, mamma, he is a little—or more than a little, a great deal—*very* like poor papa. Oh!" cried Bell, breaking off with a suppressed shriek, as a hand suddenly was laid upon her shoulder.

Nobody had observed him coming in. A light little man, with a soft step, and soft unobtrusive shoes that never had creaked in the course of their existence, upon a soft Turkey carpet, makes very little sound as he moves. He had got tired waiting outside, and the doors were open, and Mr. Gus had never been shy. He had

walked straight in, guided by their voices; and the very fact that he had thus made his way within those curtains into this sanctuary seemed to give him at once a footing in the place. He put his hand upon Bell's shoulder, and, though he was not much taller than she was, made a very respectful bow to Lady Markham over her head.

"I thought I might take the liberty to come in and speak for myself, Lady Markham," he said. There was a flutter of his eyelids, giving that sidelong glance round him, which was the only thing that betrayed Gus's consciousness that the place to which "he had taken the liberty" of coming in was his own. "My little sisters" (he put his other hand upon the shoulder of Marie, who was much consoled at thus being brought back out of the cold into which Bell's superior gifts invariably sentenced her), "My little sisters can speak better for me than I can do; and won't you take me in for the sake of the little things who have always been my friends? It is not my fault that this all came upon you as a surprise. Don't you think it would be better for everybody—for the children, and for my poor father's memory, and all, if you will just put up with having me in the house?"

Lady Markham grew very pale. She made a great effort, standing up to do it.

"Sir Augustus," she said, and nobody knew what it cost her to give him this title; all the blood ebbed away from her face: "Sir Augustus, the house is your own, it appears. What I can put up with has nothing to do with it."

"Yes," he said, tranquilly, bowing in acknowledgment, "it is my own; but it has been yours for a great many years. Why can't we be friends? I can't help being their brother, you know, whatever happens."

Alice had been sitting with her hand over her eyes. She had a special enmity towards this interloper; but now she took courage to look at him. They all looked

at him, distinct among the little group of female faces. He was *dans son droit*, and it is impossible to tell how much the certainty that all belonged to him, that he was no mere claimant, but the proud possessor of the place, changed the aspect of the little gentleman, even to those who had most reason to be wounded by it. It gave him a dignity he had never possessed before, and a magnanimity too. When he saw Alice looking at him, he left the little girls and came towards her, holding out his hands. He was a different man in this interior from what he was outside.

"I should be very fond of you if you would let me," he said. "Alice, though you are Paul's particular sister, you can't help being my sister too; and there is some one else who is a friend of mine, who has been very kind to me," the little man said significantly, sinking his voice.

What did he mean? Though she did not know what he meant, Alice felt a flame of colour flush over her cheeks in spite of herself.

"We are not monsters to disregard such an appeal," said Lady Markham. "Whatever may happen, and however we may feel, we must all acknowledge that you mean to be very kind. You will not ask us to say more just now. If you will send for your things, I will give orders to have your rooms prepared at once."

"Mamma!" they all cried, in a chorus of wonder. Alice with something like indignation, Bell and Marie with an excitement which was half pleasure: for this was novelty, at least, if nothing else, which always commends itself to the mind of youth.

"If it is his right, he shall have it," said Lady Markham, with a quiver in her voice. "Mr. Scrivener tells me we must resist no longer—and he is your brother, as he says, and we have no right to reject his kindness. Do you know, children," she cried, suddenly clasping her hands together with an impatient movement "while we are talking so much at our ease, it is not our

own house we are in, but this gentleman's house? He can turn us out of it whenever he pleases, while we are arguing whether we will let him come into it! Sir," she said, rising up once more (but she had done it once; she could not again give him the title, which ought to have been Paul's)—"Sir, I acknowledge that you are kind, generous—far more than we have any right to expect—but you will understand that such a position is not easy—that it is very strange to me—and very new, and——"

"Certainly, ma'am," said Gus. Her politeness (as he called it to himself) put him on his mettle. "All you say is very true and just. If I were a little monster, as Alice thinks, there are a great many things I could do to make myself disagreeable; and if you were not a sensible woman, as I always felt you to be, we might make a very pretty mess between us. But as we are not fiends, but good Christians (I hope), suppose you let the little ones come down with me to the village to see after my things? It's a nice afternoon, though a little dull. You ladies ought to go out too and take the air. My little dears," he said, "we'll have those big cases up; there are a lot of things in them I brought from Barbadoes expressly for you. And those sweetmeats—I told you of them the first time I came into this house."

"You said they were for me," said Marie, with a tone of reproach; "but that cannot have been true, for you did not know of me."

Gus had put one hand in Bell's arm and the other on Marie's shoulder. He looked at his two little companions with the sincerest pleasure in his little brown face.

"I did not know you were Marie, nor that this was Bell: but I knew that you were you," said the little gentleman, with a smile. "And," he added, looking round upon them all, "I knew we must be friends sooner or later. Let's go and see after the cases now."

This was how it was all arranged, to the consternation and amazement of all the world ; and Lady Markham was not less astonished than all the rest. She went to the Hall window when they were gone, and looked out after them, scarcely believing her senses. Sir Augustus Markham (as he must now be allowed to be) had put his arm into Bell's, who was nearly as tall as he was, and who had forgotten all about the bump on her forehead and the tear in her frock ; while Marie held his other hand, and skipped along by his side, now in front, now behind, looking up into his face and chattering to him. There was in Gus's gait, in his trim little figure, and his personality in general, a something which was much more like Sir William than any of his other children. It had always been a little private source of gratification to Lady Markham, notwithstanding her sincere affection for her husband, that Paul was like the Fleetwoods, who were much finer men. But this resemblance, which she had not very much desired for her own children, had settled in the unknown offspring of his youth. It added now another pang to her heartache, not only to see how like he was, but to see how entirely the children had adopted their new, yet old, brother. She withdrew from the window in a bewilderment of pain and excitement. What would Paul say to the step she had taken ? It was right, she had felt. She had done what was the hardest to do, because it seemed evident that it was the best ; but what would Paul say ? And now that all hope and resistance was over, and nothing to be done but to submit and make the best of it, what was to become of her boy ? Lady Markham had not the solace of knowing of the change that had taken place in Paul's mind. She expected nothing else than that her next meeting with Paul would be to take leave of him, to see him go away with his chosen associates ; most likely the husband of Janet Spears, or about to become so. Could Janet Spears even now secure her son to her ? bring him

back? fix him in England?—at least within reach of her care and help? And should she—could she—do anything to persuade the girl to exercise her influence? That discussion, which had been broken by the sudden appearance of Bell, and this strange episode altogether, returned to her mind as she went sadly upstairs to consult with Mrs. Fry about the rooms to be made ready for Sir Augustus. Poor Lady Markham! she would have to speak of him by this name, and to acknowledge to the servants the downfall of her own son, the descent of her own family to a lower place—Sir William's second family. It was hard—very hard—upon a woman who had been strong in a pride which had nothing bitter in it, so long as it had been unassailed, and all had gone well, but which gave her pangs now that were sufficiently difficult to bear. And then there was the dilemma in her heart still more difficult, still more painful. She had done what she thought was the best, at much cost to herself, in this matter; but ah, the other matter, which was still nearer her heart, how was she, torn as she was by diverse emotions, to know in Paul's case what was the best?

It would be needless to attempt to describe the excitement raised in the household by the announcement that "Sir Augustus" was "coming home," and that his rooms were to be got ready with all speed.

"My lady has give up the very best of everything," Mrs. Fry said, solemnly; "and as considerate, thinking which was to be the warmest, seeing as he's come from India, where it is *that* warm. It would not become us as are only servants, to be more particular than my lady, or else I don't know that I could make it convenient to stay with a gentleman as has the blood of niggers in his veins."

"I knowed it!" Mr. Brown said, slapping his thigh; he was usually more guarded in his language, but excitement carries the day over grammar even with persons of more elevated breeding. "The last time as ever I helped him on with his coat there was something as

told me it was him that was the man, and not Paul. Well! I don't say as I don't regret it in some ways, but pride must have a fall, as the Bible says."

"I don't see as it lays in your spere to quote the Bible on any such subject," said Mrs. Fry with indignation. "If it's Mr. Paul, I just wish he had a little more pride. His dear mother would be easier in her mind this day if he was one that held more by his own class. And if you're pleased, you that have eat their bread this fifteen years, to have a bit of a little upstart that is only half an Englishman, instead of your young master that you've seen grown up from a boy—and as handsome a boy as one could wish to see—I don't think much of your Christianity, and quoting out of the Bible. It's easier a deal to do that than to perform what's put down there."

"I hope I knows my duty, ma'am," said Mr. Brown, resuming the dignity which excitement had momentarily shaken, "without instruction from you or any one."

"I hope you do, Mr. Brown," said Mrs. Fry. And this little passage of arms restored the equilibrium of these two important members of the household. But when it became known in the village and at the station, where the great cases which had been lying at the latter place were ordered by Sir Augustus to be carried to the house, and his portmanteau brought from the Markham Arms, and when slowly, through a hundred rills of conflicting information, the news got spread about the country till it flooded, like a rushing torrent, all the great houses and all the outlying villages—drove the Trevors and the Westlands half out of their senses, and communicated a sudden vertigo to the entire neighbourhood—words fail us to describe the commotion. Everybody had known there was something wrong, but who could have imagined anything so sweeping and complete. "You see now, mamma, how right I was to let Paul alone," Ada Westland said with her frank cynicism. "We must see that your papa calls upon Sir

Augustus," that far-seeing mother replied. As for old Admiral Trevor, who was getting more and more into his dotage every day, he ordered his carriage at once to go out and "putsh shtop to it." "Will Markham ought to be ashamed of himself," the old sailor said. The same impulse moved the inhabitants of the rectory, both father and daughter. Mr. Stainforth did nothing but go about his garden all day wringing his hands and crying, "Dear! dear!" and trying to recollect something about it, some way of proving an *alibi* or getting evidence to show that it was impossible. He, too, felt that it was his duty to put a stop to it. And as for Dolly, what could she do but cry her pretty eyes out, and wish, oh so vainly, that she had a hundred thousand pounds that she might give it all to Paul!

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

LADY MARKHAM, when she thus received Sir Augustus, did so with no intention of herself remaining in the house which had been her home for so long. In any case, when the lawyer had pronounced that there was no longer any room for resistance, she would have yielded; she would not have prolonged a vain struggle, or given the new owner any trouble in gaining possession of his house. When she lay down that night for the first time under the same roof with the interloper, he who had, she said to herself, ruined her son's prospects, and taken his inheritance from him, she had not that satisfaction in her mind of having done her duty which is supposed to be the unfailing recompense of a good action. She had done her duty, she hoped. She did not think that she was justified in refusing Sir Gus's overtures, or in turning him into an enemy; but it was with a sore heart and mind, much exercised

with doubt, that she thought of what she had done. It was right in one way, but was it right in another? What would Paul think of her apparent alliance and friendship with the man who certainly had been his supplanter, and so far as any one could see had spoiled his life? Paul was Lady Markham's dearest son, but he was the darkest place in her landscape, the subject which she dwelt upon most, yet had least comfort in contemplating. Notwithstanding the love and anxiety which he called forth in her, all the questions connected with him were so painful that, if she could, she would have avoided them altogether. What was he going to do? Was he on the eve of the voyage which might separate him from her for ever? Was he on the eve of the marriage that would separate them still more? She longed and pined every day for letters from him, and yet when the post brought none, she was almost relieved. At least he was not going yet, at least he was not married yet. She wrote to him almost every day, and lavished upon him a thousand tendernesses, and yet it was no pleasure to her to think of Paul. His very name brought an additional line to her forehead and quiver to her lip.

Next morning she was more undecided than ever. What was she to do? Again the post had come in, and Paul had not added a word to the information she had received. He had not said whether he was coming, or what he was going to do. It occurred to her as she was dressing that the presence of his stepbrother in the house might keep him away—that indeed it was almost certain to keep him away, and that this afforded an urgent reason for speedy removal. The idea gave her a sensation of hurry and nervous haste. There was a dower-house on the estate near the town of Farborough to which perhaps it would be well for her to retire. But when she thought of all that would be involved in the removal, Lady Markham's courage failed her. Why did not this man keep away? A few months she might

at least have had to detach herself, to accustom herself to the change. It seemed hard, very hard, to face everything at once. Had she really been right after all in yielding? Ought she not to have stood out and made her bargain for time enough to prepare her removal tranquilly? In the days when a glow of satisfaction followed every good action, there must have been more absolute certainty upon the subject, what was good and what was evil, than exists now. The kindness, the self-sacrifice of her act had made it appear the best, the only thing to do; but now came the cold shadow of doubt. Had not she compromised her dignity by doing it? Had not she done something that would offend and alienate Paul? The night not only had not brought counsel, but it had made all her difficulties worse.

When Lady Markham went downstairs, however, the first sight which met her eyes was one of at least a very conciliatory character. In the hall stood one of Gus's larger packing-cases, those cases which had been lying at the station for so long, opened at last, and giving forth its riches. The floor was covered with West Indian smeatmeats, pots of guava jelly, and ginger, and many other tropical dainties; while the two little girls, in high excitement, were taking out the stores which remained, the scented neck-laces and bark-lace, and all the curious manufactures of the island; they were speechless with delight and enthusiasm, yet bursting out now and then into torrents of questions, asking about everything. Gus sat complacently in the midst of all the rubbish in the big bamboo-chair, stretching out his little legs and rubbing his hands. "I told you I brought them for you," he was saying. Bell and Marie could not believe their eyes as they saw the heaps that accumulated round them. "I thought you would like to give presents to your little friends; there is plenty for everybody."

"But oh! Mr. Gus," cried Marie, dancing about him,

"how could you know just what we wanted? how could you tell we should have friends?"

It was pretty to see him sitting among the litter, his brown countenance beaming.

"I knew, of course, you must be nice children," he said; "I knew what you would want. But you must not call me Mr. Gus any longer. Call me Gus without the mister."

The two little girls looked at each other and laughed.

"But you are so old," they said.

"It's a pity, isn't it?" said the little gentleman.

They were as much at their ease together as if they had known him all their lives. What mother could resist such a scene? She paused on the stairs and looked over the banisters and watched them. If it had not been for the tragedy involved, for her husband's death and her son's disinheritance, what more pleasant than this domestic scene! The children had never been so much at their ease with their father, nor would it have occurred to them to use half so much freedom with Paul as they did with the stranger Gus. Lady Markham's heart thrilled with pleasure and pain, and when at last she went downstairs, there was a tone of cordiality in spite of herself in her morning greeting.

"I fear I am a little late. I have kept you waiting," she said.

"Oh mamma! he has had his breakfast with us," cried the little girls.

"You must not mind me. I am from the tropics. I always rise with the dawn," said the little man. "But I am quite happy so long as I have the children."

He followed her into the breakfast-room, Bell linking herself on to his arm and Marie holding his hand. They brought in some of the sweetmeats with them, and the little girls began with great importance to open them, each making her offering to mamma. It was the first appearance of anything like cheerfulness since grief had entered the house. While this little bustle

was going on, Alice came in after her mother very quietly, hoping to avoid all necessity of speaking to the intruder. The feeling that was in her mind was that she could not endure to see him here, and that if her mother would not leave the place, she at least must. When Gus saw her, however, her hope of escape was over. He came up to her at once and took her hand, and made a little speech.

"You will not make friends with me as the children do," he said; "but you will find your old brother will always stand your friend if you want one."

Alice drew her hand away and escaped to her usual place with her cheeks blazing. Why did he offer to "stand her friend?" what did he mean by his reference last night to some one else? She knew very well what he meant—it was this that made it impertinent. He had met her two or three times with Mr. Fairfax, and no doubt had been so vulgar and disagreeable as to suppose that Mr. Fairfax—not having the least idea of course how they had been brought together, and that Mr. Fairfax's presence at Markham was entirely accidental! Alice knew perfectly well what Gus meant. He thought the young man was an undistinguished lover, whom probably Lady Markham would not accept, but whom Alice was ready enough to accept, and it was in this light that he proffered his presumptuous and undesired help. Alice could not trust herself to speak. It seemed to her that besides the harm it had done Paul, there was another wrong to herself in these injudicious, unnecessary offers of assistance. She would not look at the curiosities the little girls carried in their frocks, folding up their skirts to make great pockets, nor taste their sweetmeats, nor countenance their pleasure. Instead of that, Alice wrapped herself up in abstraction and sadness. To be able to hide some sulkiness and a great deal of annoyance and bitter constraint under the mask of grief is often a great ease to the spirit. She had the satisfaction of checking all

the glee of Marie and Bell, and of making even Lady Markham repent of the smile into which she had been beguiled.

Thus, however, the day went on. When Lady Markham again watched her children going down the avenue, one on either side of the new master of the house, with a softened look in her face, Alice turned away from her mother with the keenest displeasure; she forsook her altogether, going away from her to her own room, where she shut herself up and began to make a review of all her little possessions with the view of removing them, somewhere, anywhere, she did not care where. And very dismal visions crossed the inexperienced mind of Alice. She did not know how this miserable change in the family affairs affected her own position or her mother's. She thought, perhaps, that they had lost everything, as Paul had lost everything. And sooner than live on the bounty of this stranger, Alice felt that there was nothing she could not do. She thought of going out as a governess, as girls do in novels. Why not? What was she better than the thousands of girls who did so, and rather that a hundred times, rather that or anything! Then it occurred to her that perhaps she might go with Paul. That, perhaps, would be a better way. Even in the former days, out of the midst of luxury and comfort, it had seemed to her that Paul's dream of living a primitive life and cultivating his bit of land, his just share of the universal possession of man, had something fine, something noble in it. With her brother she could go to the end of the world to sustain and comfort him. What would she care what she did? Would she be less a lady if she cooked his dinner or washed his clothes? Nay, not at all. What better could any woman wish? But then there was this girl—the man's daughter who had been at Markham with Paul. Thus Alice was suddenly stopped again. Walls of iron seemed to rise around her wherever she turned. Was it possible, was it possible? Paul, who was so

fastidious, so hard to please! Thus when despairing of the circumstances around herself she turned to the idea of her brother, her heart grew sick with a new and cruel barrier before her. An alien had come into her home and spoiled it; an alien was to share her brother's life and ruin that. All around her the world was breaking in with an insupportable intrusion—people who had nothing to do with her coming into the very sanctuary of her life. Lady Markham was going to put up with it, as it seemed, but Alice said to herself that she could not, would not, put up with it. She could not tell what she would do, or where she would flee, but to tolerate the man who had taken Paul's inheritance, or the woman who had got Paul's heart, was above her strength. Should she go out as a governess? this seemed the one outlet; or—was there any other?

Now, how it was that Fairfax should have suddenly leaped into her mind with as startling an effect as if he had come through the window, or down from the sky in bodily presence, I cannot pretend to tell. For a little while he had been her chief companion—her helpmate, so to speak—and, at the same time, her servant, watching her looks to see what he could do for her—ready to fly, on a moment's notice, to supplement her services in the sick-room—making of himself, indeed, a sort of complement of her and other self, doing the things she could not do. He had been, not like Paul at home, for Paul had never been so ready and helpful, but like nothing else than a man-Alice, another half of her, understanding her before she spoke—doing what she wished by intuition. This had not lasted very long, it is true, but while it had lasted, it had been like nothing that Alice had ever known. She had said to herself often that she scarcely knew him. He had come into her life by accident, and he had gone out of it just as suddenly, and with an almost angry dismissal on her part. Scarcely knew him! and yet was there anybody that she knew half so well? Why Fairfax should have

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is often easier to justify one's self to others than to respond to the secret doubts that arise in one's own bosom; but when the gloomy looks of Alice proclaimed the indictment that was being drawn up against her mother in her mind, Lady Markham, strangely enough, began to feel the balance turn, and a little self-assertion came to her aid. But she was very glad of the opportunity given her by a visit from the Rector to send for her daughter, who had not come near her all the morning. The Rector was not a very frequent visitor at the Chase, nor indeed anywhere. He was old, and he was growing feeble, and he did not care to move about. It was, however, so natural that he should make his appearance in the trouble which existed in the house, that nothing but a visit of sympathy was thought of. And Dolly was with him, upon whom Lady Markham looked with different eyes—a little jealous, a little tender—ready to find out every evidence the girl might show of interest in Paul. There was abundant opportunity to judge of her feelings in this respect, for Paul was the chief subject spoken of. Mr. Stainforth had come with no other object. He led Lady Markham to the further end of the room while the two girls talked.

"I want to say something to you," he said. It was to ask what Paul was going to do—what his intentions were. "It breaks my heart to think of it," said the old man; "but we must submit to fate." He was something of a heathen, though he was a clergyman, and this was how he chose to put it: "What is he going to do?"

Alas! of all the subjects on which his mother could have been questioned, this was the most embarrassing. She sighed, and said—

"I cannot tell. There were some schemes in his head—or rather he had been drawn into some schemes—of emigration—before all this sorrow came."

"Emigration! before——!"

The rector could not make this out.

suddenly become, as it were, visible to her in the midst of her thoughts, she did not know. One moment she could see nothing but those closing walls around her—a barrier here, a barrier there; no way of escape. When all at once, in the twinkling of an eye, there was a glimmer in the darkness, an opening, and there he stood, looking at her tenderly, deprecating, yet with a gleam of humour in his eyes. "You won't have anything to say to me," he seemed to be saying; "but all the same, if you should think better of it, I am here."

It is impossible to tell the effect this sudden apparition, as confusing as if he had actually come in person, had upon Alice. She was so angry, that she beat her hands together in sudden rage—with whom—with herself? for if the treacherous heart within her conjured up the young man's image, was it Mr. Fairfax's fault? But it was against him that she threw out all that unnecessary anger. How dared he come when she wanted none of him! To intrude yourself into a girl's presence when she does not want you is bad enough, but to leap thus into her imagination! it was insupportable. She struck her hands together with a kind of fury—it was a way she had—her cheeks grew crimson, her heart thumped quite unnecessarily against her breast. And all the time he seemed to stand and look at her not tragically, or with any heroic aspect (which did not belong to him), but with that half smiling, half upbraiding look, and always a little gleam of fun in his eyes. "If you should think better of it, I am always here." The words she put into his mouth were quite characteristic of him. No high-flown professions of faithfulness and devotion could have said more.

Lady Markham had seen clearly enough that Alice was no longer in sympathy with her, and her heart bled for the separation and for the shadow in her child's face, even while she could not refuse to feel a certain satisfaction otherwise in the step she had taken. It

is often easier to justify one's self to others than to respond to the secret doubts that arise in one's own bosom; but when the gloomy looks of Alice proclaimed the indictment that was being drawn up against her mother in her mind, Lady Markham, strangely enough, began to feel the balance turn, and a little self-assertion came to her aid. But she was very glad of the opportunity given her by a visit from the Rector to send for her daughter, who had not come near her all the morning. The Rector was not a very frequent visitor at the Chase, nor indeed anywhere. He was old, and he was growing feeble, and he did not care to move about. It was, however, so natural that he should make his appearance in the trouble which existed in the house, that nothing but a visit of sympathy was thought of. And Dolly was with him, upon whom Lady Markham looked with different eyes—a little jealous, a little tender—ready to find out every evidence the girl might show of interest in Paul. There was abundant opportunity to judge of her feelings in this respect, for Paul was the chief subject spoken of. Mr. Stainforth had come with no other object. He led Lady Markham to the further end of the room while the two girls talked.

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"Emigration! before——!"

The rector could not make this out.

"You know that his opinions gave us some trouble. It was a—visionary scheme—for the advantage of other people," Lady Markham said.

"Ah! there must be no more of that, my dear Lady Markham; there must be no more of that. Socialism under some gloss or other, I know:—but life has become too serious with Paul now for any nonsense like that."

"I wish I could think he would see it in that light," said his mother, shaking her head.

"But he *must*; there is no choice left him. He must see it in that light. I do not know whether this that I am going to suggest ever came into your mind. Lady Markham, Paul must take the living, that is all about it. He must take orders; and as soon as he is ready, I will abdicate. I should have done so long ago had there been a son of the house coming on. He must go into the Church—that is by far the best thing to do."

"The Church!" said Lady Markham, in extreme surprise. "I fear he would never think of that, Mr. Stainforth."

"Then he will be very foolish," said the old Rector. "What do these foolish young fellows mean? It is an excellent living, a good house, not too much to do, good society, and a good position. Suppose they don't like visiting old women, and that sort of thing, they can always get some one to do it for them—a curate at the worst, for that costs money; but most likely the ladies about. If he marries, which of course he would do, his wife would attend to that. There is Dolly, who saves me a great deal of trouble. She is quite as good as a curate. Oh, for that matter, there are as great drawbacks in the Church as in other professions. What do the young fellows mean, Lady Markham, to reject a very desirable life for such little annoyances as that?"

Lady Markham still shook her head notwithstanding the Rector's eloquence.

"Paul would not see it in that light," she said.

"Unless he could throw himself into all the duties with his whole heart, he would never do it, and I fear he would not be able to do that."

"This is nonsense," said Mr. Stainforth. The old man was very much in earnest. "I would soon show him that all that is really necessary is very easy to get through, and short of his natural position there would be none so suitable. He must think of it. I cannot think of anything that would be so suitable. The bar is overcrowded, he is not a fellow to think of the army, though, indeed," said the old man, with a cold-blooded determination to say out all he meant, "if there was a war, and men had a chance of good promotion, I don't know that I should say anything against that. But the Church, Lady Markham, the Church:—Almost as good a house as this is, if not so big, and a great deal of leisure. I assure you I could easily convince him that there is nothing he could choose which would not afford drawbacks quite as great. And, short of his natural position, the Rector of Markham Royal is not a bad thing to look to. He might marry well, and as probably the other will never marry——"

"Ah!" said Lady Markham, with her eyes full of tears, "it is easy to talk; but Paul would never lend any ear to that. In all likelihood, so far as I know, his decision is already made. That is to say," she added with a sigh, "it was all settled before. Why should he change now when everything favours him? when Providence itself has moved all hindrances out of his way?"

"But he must not, Madam," cried the Rector, raising his voice. "What, emigrate! and leave you here in your widowhood with no one to stand by you! This is nonsense—nonsense, Lady Markham. I assure you, my dear Madam, it is impossible, it must not be."

Lady Markham smiled faintly through her tears. She shook her head. It seemed to her that the old Rector, with all his long life behind him, was so much

less experienced, so much more youthful than she was. *Must* not be! What did it matter who said that so long as the boy himself did not say it? The Rector had so raised his voice that the two girls had an excuse for coming nearer, for asking, with their eyes at least, what it was.

"The Rector says Paul must not go; that he ought to go into the Church and succeed to the living. Ah!" cried Lady Markham, "it is so easy to say 'ought' and 'must not.' And what can I say? that he will do what he thinks right, not what we think right. What does any-one else matter? He will do—what he likes himself."

Her voice was choked—her heart was very sore. Never had she breathed a word of censure upon Paul to other ears than perhaps those of Alice before. Her usual strength had forsaken her. And Alice, who was estranged and chilled, did not go near her mother. Dolly Stainforth had never been brought up to neglect her duties in this particular. Her business in life had always been with people who were in trouble; a kind of professional habit, so to speak, delivered her from shyness even when her own feelings were concerned. She went up quickly to the poor lady who was weeping, without restraint, and took her hand in those soft little firm hands which had held up so many. Not so much a shy girl full of great tenderness as a little celestial curate, devoted everywhere to the service of the sorrowful, she did not blush or hesitate, but with two big tears in her eyes spoke her consolation.

"Oh dear Lady Markham," Dolly said, "are you not proud, are you not happy to know that it is only what he thinks right that he will do? What could any one say more? Papa does not know him as—as *you* do. He thinks he might be persuaded, though his heart would not be in it; but you—you would not have him do that? I—" said Dolly all unawares, betraying herself with a little sob in her throat and her voice sinking

so low as almost to be inaudible—"I" (as if she had anything to do with it! strong emotion gave her such importance) "would rather he should go—than stay like that!"

Lady Markham clasped her fingers about those two little firm yet tremulous hands. It was the kind of consolation she wanted. She put up her face to kiss Dolly, who straightway broke down and cried, and was an angel-curate no longer. By this time herself had come in, and her own deep-seated, childish preference, which she had not known to be love. "Tch—tch—tch," said the Rector under his breath, thinking within himself some common thought about the ridiculousness of women, even the best. But already there were other spectators who had seen and heard some portion of what was going on. It was the worst of Lady Markham's pretty room that it was liable to be approached without warning. Alice suddenly sprang up with a cry of astonishment, dismay, and delight. "Paul!" she cried, startling the whole party as if a shell had fallen among them. The young man stood within the half-drawn curtains with a pale and serious face, looking at the group. His mother thought of but one thing as she looked up and saw him before her. He had come to tell her that now all was over, and nothing remaining but the last farewell to say.

The rest of the party did not see, however, what Alice, who was detached from them saw, that there was some one beyond the curtains, hanging outside as one who had no right to enter—a little downcast, but yet, as always, faintly amused by the situation. The sight of him gave her a shock as of a dream come true. "If you should think better of it," he seemed to be saying. The sudden apparition, with the smile about the corners of his lips which seemed so familiar, startled her as much as the appearance which her imagination had called forth a few hours before.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE presence of Mr. Stainforth and his daughter added another embarrassment to the sudden arrival of Paul. His mother did not know what to say to him, how to restrain her questions,—how to talk of his health and his occupations, if the journey had been pleasant, how he had come from the station, and all the other trivialities which are said to a visitor suddenly arriving. She had to treat Paul like a visitor while the others were there. Paul for his part answered these matter-of-course questions very briefly. He had an air of suffering both mentally and bodily, and he was very pale. He looked at Dolly Stainforth, and said nothing, sitting in the shade as far from the great window as possible. And the Rector would not go away. He sat and put innumerable questions to the new-comer. What he was going to do? What he thought of this thing and the other? Of course he was going back to Oxford to take his degree? that was the one thing that was indispensable. Paul gave the shortest possible answers to every question, and they were not of a satisfactory description. His mother, anxiously watching and fretting beyond measure to be thus kept in suspense about his purposes, could get no information from what he said to Mr. Stainforth, nor did the earnest gaze she had fixed upon him bring her any more enlightenment. Alice had gone out beyond the shade of the curtains to speak to Fairfax, and the embarrassment of the four thus left together was extreme. Dolly had not spoken a word since Paul entered. She had given him her hand, no more, when he came in, but she did not speak to him or even raise her head, except to listen with something of the same breathless anxiety as was apparent in Lady Markham's face, while the old Rector went on with his questions and

advice. The two women trembled in concert with a mutual sense of intolerable suspense, scarcely able to bear it. Dolly knew, however, that she would have to bear it, that she had nothing to do with the matter, that the only service she could do them was to relieve the mother and son of her presence and that of her father, who, however, after she had at length got him to his feet, still stood for ten minutes at least holding Paul's hand and impressing a great many platitudes upon his attention—with "Depend upon it, my dear boy," and "You may take my word for it." Paul had no mind to depend upon anything he said or to take his word for it in any way. He stood saying "Yes" and "No," or replying only with a nod of his head to his mentor. But Mr. Stainforth was not at all aware that he had stayed a second too long. He blamed Dolly for the haste with which she had hurried him away. "But I am glad I had the opportunity of seeing Paul," the old man said complacently, as his daughter drove him down the avenue. "You must have seen how pleased he was to talk his circumstances over with such an old friend as myself. Poor fellow, that is just what he must most want now. The ladies are very much attached to him, of course, but with the best intentions in the world, how can they know? He wants a man to talk to," said Mr. Stainforth; and "I suppose so, papa," Dolly said.

Lady Markham turned to her son as soon as the Rector's back was turned, her face quivering with anxiety. "Paul? Paul?" she said with the intensest question in her tone, though she asked nothing, seizing him by both hands.

"Well, mother?" He met her eye with something of the old impatience in his voice.

"You have come to tell me——?" she said breathless.

"I don't know what I have come to tell you. I have come to collect some of my things. You speak as if I had some important decision to make. You forget that there is nothing important about me, mother, one way

or another," Paul said with a smile. It was an angry smile, and it did not reassure his anxious hearer. He gave a little wave with his hand towards the larger room. "Fairfax is with me," he said.

"Mr. Fairfax! I thought we might have had you to ourselves for this time at least." There was a querulous tone in her voice. He did not know that she was thinking of what he considered an old affair, of a separation which might be for ever. All that had been swept away completely out of Paul's mind as if it had never been, and he could not comprehend her anxiety. "But," she added, recollecting herself, "I might have known that could not be. Paul, I don't know what you will say to me. I was in a great difficulty. I did not know what to do. I have let *him* come to the house. He is here, actually staying here now."

"*He!* What do you mean by *he?*" Then while she looked at him with the keenest anxiety, a gleam of understanding and contemptuous anger came over his face. "Well!" he said, "I suppose you could not shut him out of what is his own house."

"I might have left it, my dear. I intend to leave it——"

"Why?" he said; "if you can live under the same roof with him, why not? Do you think I will have any objection? It cannot matter much to me."

It was all settled then! She looked at him wistfully with a smile of pain, clasping her hands together. "He is very friendly, Paul. He wants to be very kind. And it is better there should be no scandal. I have your—poor father's memory to think of——"

Paul's face again took its sternest look. "It is a pity he himself had not thought a little of what was to come after. I am going to put my things together, mother."

"But you will stay, you are not going away to-night—not directly, Paul!"

"Shall I have to ask Sir Gus's leave to stay?" he said with a harsh laugh.

"Oh, Paul, you are very unkind, more unkind than he is," said Lady Markham, with tears in her eyes. "He has never taken anything upon him. Up to this moment it has never been suggested to me that I was not in my own house."

"Nevertheless, it is his," said her son. He made a step or two towards the opening, then turned back with some embarrassment. "Mother, it is possible—I do not say likely—but still it is possible: that—Spears may come here to make some final arrangements to-morrow, before he goes."

"Oh Paul!" she said, with a low cry of pain: but there was nothing in this exclamation to which he could make any reply. He hesitated for a moment, then turned again and went away. Lady Markham stood where he had left her, clasping her hands together against her bosom as if to staunch the wounds she had received and hide them, feeling the throb and ache of suffering go over her from head to foot. She felt that he was merciless, not only abandoning her without a word of regret, but parading before her his preparations for this mad journey, and the new companions who were to replace his family in his life. But Paul only thought she was displeased by the name of Spears. He went his way heavily enough, going through the familiar place which was no longer home, to the room which had been his from his childhood, but was his no longer. As if this was not pain enough, there was looming before him, threatening him, this shadow of a last explanation with Spears. What was there to explain to Spears? He could not tell. Others had deserted the undertaking as well as he. And Paul would not say to himself that there was another question, though he was aware of it to the depths of his being. Not a word had been said about Janet; yet it was not possible but that something must be said on that subject. His whole life was still made uncertain, doubtful, suspended in a horrible uncertainty because

of this. What honour demanded of him, Paul knew that he must do; but what was it that honour demanded? It was the last question of his old life that remained to be settled, but it was a bitter question. And just when it had to be decided, just when it was necessary that he should brave himself to do what might turn out to be his duty, why, why was he made the hearer unawares of Dolly's little address in his defence? She had always stood up for him; he remembered many a boyish offence in which Dolly, a mere baby, uncertain in speech, had stood up for him. If he had to do *this*—which he did not describe to himself in other words—Dolly would still stand up for him. With all these thoughts in his mind as he went upstairs, Paul was far too deeply occupied to think much of the personage whom he contemptuously called Sir Gus—Sir Gus was only an accident, though a painful and almost fatal one, in the young man's path.

When Lady Markham had sufficiently overcome the sharp keenness of this latest wound, her ear was caught by a murmur of voices in the other room. This had been going on, she was vaguely sensible, for some time, through all Mr. Stainforth's lingering and leavetaking, and through her own conversation with Paul; voices that were low and soft—not obtrusive; as if the speakers had no wish to attract attention, or to have their talk interfered with. Perhaps this tone is of all others the most likely to provoke any listener into interruption. A vague uneasiness awoke in Lady Markham's mind. She put back the curtains which had partially veiled the entrance to her own room with a slightly impatient hand. When one is wounded and aching in heart and mind, it is so hard not to be impatient. Alice had seated herself in a low chair, half hidden in one of the lace curtains that veiled a window, and Fairfax was leaning against the window talking to her. There was something tender and confidential in the sound of his voice. It was he who spoke most, but her replies were in the

same tone, a tone of which both were entirely unconscious, but which struck Lady Markham with mingled suspicion and alarm. How had these two got to know each other well enough to speak in such subdued voices? She had never known or realised how much they had been thrown together during her absence in the sick room. When she drew back the curtain, Alice instinctively withdrew her chair a hair's breadth, and Fairfax stood quite upright, leaning upon the window no longer. This alteration of their attitudes at the sight of her startled Lady Markham still more. Fairfax came forward hurriedly as she came into the drawing-room, a little flushed and nervous.

"I **hope** you will not consider this visit an impertinence," he said. "I thought I must come with Markham to take care of him. He—twisted his foot—did he tell you? It is all right now, but I thought it would be well to come and take care of him," Fairfax said, with that conciliatory smile and unnecessary repetition which marked his own consciousness of a feeble cause.

"I did not hear anything about it," Lady Markham said. "He has been writing me very short letters. You are very kind, Mr. Fairfax—very kind; we know that of old."

"That is the last name to give my selfish intrusion," he said; then added, after a pause, "And I had something I wanted to speak to you about. Did Miss Markham," he said, hesitating, shifting from one foot to the other, and showing every symptom of extreme embarrassment—"Did Miss Markham tell you—what I had been saying to her?"

Alice had taken occasion of her mother's entry upon the scene to rise from her chair and come quite out of the shelter of the curtain. She was standing (as indeed they all were) immediately in front of the window, with the light full upon her, when he put this question. He looked from Lady Markham to her as he spoke, and by

bad luck caught Alice's eye. Then—why or wherefore, who could say?—the countenances of these two foolish young people suddenly flamed, the one taking light from the other, with the most hot and overwhelming blush. Alice seemed to be enveloped in it; she felt it passing over her like the sudden reflection of some instantaneous flame. She shrank back a step, her eyes fell with an embarrassment beyond all power of explanation. As for Fairfax, he stole a second guilty look at her, and stopped short—his voice suddenly breaking off with a thrill in it, like that of a cord that has snapped. Lady Markham looked on at this extraordinary pantomime with consternation. What could she think, or any mother? She felt herself grow crimson, too, with alarm and distress.

"What was it you were saying, Mr. Fairfax? Alice has not said anything to me."

"O—oh!" he said; then gave a faint little laugh of agitation and confusion, and something that sounded strangely like happiness. "It was—nothing—not much—something of very little importance—only about myself. Perhaps you would let me have a little conversation, when it is quite convenient, Lady Markham, with you?"

"Surely," she said, but with a coldness she could not restrain. What a thing it is to be a mother! The sentiment has found utterance in Greek, so it does not profess to be novel. If not one thing, then another; sometimes two troubles together, or six, as many as she has children—except that, in the merciful dispensation of Providence, the woman who has many children cannot make herself so wretched about every individual as she who has few contrives to do. Only Paul and Alice however were old enough to give their mother this kind of discipline, and in a moment she felt herself plunged into the depths of a second anxiety. There was a very uncomfortable pause. Alice would have liked to run away to her room, to hide herself in utter

shame of her own weakness, but dared not, fearing that this would only call the attention of the others more forcibly to it—as if anything was wanted to confirm that impression! She stood still, therefore, for a few minutes, and made one or two extremely formal remarks, pointing out that the days were already much shorter and the afternoon beginning to close in. Both her companions assented, the one with tender, the other with suspicious and alarmed glances. Then it occurred to Alice to say that she would go and see if Paul wanted anything. The others watched her breathless as she went away.

“Mr. Fairfax, what does this mean?” said Lady Markham, almost haughtily.

Was it not enough to make the politest of women forget her manners? Fairfax did not know, any more than she did, what it meant. He hoped that it meant a great deal more than he had ever hoped, and his heart was dancing with sudden pride and happiness.

“It means,” he said, “dear Lady Markham, what you see: that I have forgotten myself, and that being nobody, I have ventured to lift my eyes—oh, don’t imagine I don’t know it!—to one who is immeasurably above me—to one who—I won’t trust myself to say anything about her—*you* know,” said the young man. “How could I help it? I saw her—though it was but for a little while—every day.”

“When her father was dying!” cried Lady Markham, with a sob. This was what went to her heart. Her Alice, her spotless child—to let this stranger woo her in the very shadow of her father’s death-bed. She covered her face with her hands. Paul had not wrung her heart enough; there was one more drop of pain to be crushed out.

“I did not think of that. I did not think of anything, except that I was there—in a paradise I had no right to be in—by her side: heaven knows how. I had so little right to it that it looked like heaven’s

own doing, Lady Markham. I did not know there was any such garden of Eden in the world," he said. "I never knew there was such a woman as you; and then she—that was the crown of all. Do you think I intended it? I was surprised out of my senses altogether. I should have liked to stretch myself out like a bit of carpet for you to walk on: and she——"

"Mr. Fairfax, this is nonsense," said Lady Markham, but in a softened tone. "My daughter is just like other girls; but when I was compelled to leave her, when my other duties called me, could I have supposed that a gentleman would have taken advantage——"

"Ah!" he said, with a tone of profound discouragement, "perhaps that is what it is—perhaps it may be because I am not what people call a gentleman."

"Mr. Fairfax!" cried Lady Markham, with horror in her voice.

"Yes," he said, with a sigh, "it is out now; that is what I wanted to ask if Miss Markham had told you. I am nobody, Lady Markham. I don't belong to the Wiltshire Fairfaxes, or to the Fairfaxes of the north, or to any Fairfaxes that ever were heard of: I told her so. I did not want to come into your house under false pretences; and it was *that* that I meant to ask Miss Markham when—I betrayed myself."

"*You* betrayed yourself?" Lady Markham was entirely bewildered; for to her it appeared that it was Alice who had betrayed herself. But this new statement calmed and restrained her. If he had not remarked, perhaps, the agitation of Alice, it was not for her mother to point it out. "Am I to understand, Mr. Fairfax, that you said anything to Alice, when you were here in the midst of our trouble——?"

"No," he cried out; "surely no. What do you take me for?"

She put out her hand to him with her usual gracious kindness: "For a gentleman, Mr. Fairfax; and the

kindest heart in the world. Of course I knew there must be some mistake."

But when they had gone through this explanation and reconciliation, they came back simultaneously to a recollection of that blaze of sudden colour on Alice's face, and felt the one with rapture, the other with great alarm and tribulation, that in respect to this there could not be any mistake.

"But, Lady Markham," said the young man, "all this does not alter my circumstances. You are very kind and good to me; but here are the facts of the case. I have seen her now; none of us can alter that. It was not, so to speak, my doing. It was—accident, as people say. When a man has had a revelation like this, he does not believe it is an accident; he knows," said Fairfax, with a slight quiver of his lip, "that something higher than accident has had to do with it. And it can't be altered now. When that comes into a man's heart, it is for his life. And, at the same time, I confess to you that I am nobody, Lady Markham—not fit to tie her shoe; but I might be a prince, and not good enough for that. What is to be done with me? Am I to be put to the door once for all, and never to come near her again? Whatever you say I am to do, I will do it. I believe in you as I do in heaven. What you tell me, I will do it; though it may make an end of me, it shall be done all the same."

"Did you come to Markham all the way to say this to me, Mr. Fairfax?" Lady Markham put the question only to gain a little time.

"No; I came pretending it was to take care of Paul, who *did* twist his foot—that is true; and pretending that it was to ask you to persuade him to let me help him (I know a few people and that sort of thing," said Fairfax hurriedly); "but I believe, if I must tell the truth, it was only just to have the chance of getting one look at her again. That was all. I did not mean to be so bold as to say a word—only to see her again."

"You wanted to help Paul!" Lady Markham felt her head going round. If he was nobody, how could he help Paul? The whole imbroglio seemed more than she could fathom. And Fairfax was confused too.

"There are some little things—that I have in my power: I thought, if he would let me, I might set him in the way——: I'll speak of all that another time, Lady Markham. When a thing like this gets the upper hand, one can't get one's head clear for anything else. Now that I have betrayed myself, which I did not mean to, tell me—tell me what is to be done with me. I cannot think of anything else."

What was to be done with him? It is to be feared that, kind as Lady Markham was, she would have made but short work with Fairfax, had it been he only who had betrayed himself. But the light that had blazed on the face of Alice was another kind of illumination altogether. A hasty sentence would not answer here.

CHAPTER XL.

It would have been difficult to imagine a more embarrassed and embarrassing party than were the Markham family, when they assembled to dinner that evening. Sir Gus and the little girls had met Fairfax going down the avenue, and had tried every persuasion in their power to induce him to return with them; but he would not do so. "I am coming back to-morrow," he said; but for this evening he was bound for the Markham Arms, where he had been before, and nothing would move him from his determination.

When Gus went into the drawing-room with his little companions, the tea was found there, all alone in solitary dignity; the table set out, the china and silver

shining, the little kettle emitting cheerful puffs of steam, but no one visible. What can be more dismal than this ghost of the cheerfulest of refreshments—the tea made and waiting, but not a woman to be seen? It impressed this innocent group with a sense of misfortune.

"Where can they be?" Bell cried; and she ran upstairs, sending her summons before her: "Mamma—mamma—please come to tea."

By and by, however, Bell came down looking extremely grave.

"Mamma has a headache," she said. This was a calamity almost unknown at Markham. "And Alice has a headache too," she added, after a moment's pause.

Bell's looks were very serious, and the occasion could scarcely be called less than tragical. The little girls themselves had to make Gus's tea—they did it, as it were, in a whisper—one putting in the sugar, the other burning her fingers with the tea-pot. It was not like afternoon tea at all, but like some late meal in the schoolroom when Mademoiselle had a headache. It was only Mademoiselle who was given to headache at Markham. It was Brown who told Sir Augustus of Paul's arrival. Lady Markham had been wounded by Brown's behaviour from the first. He had not clung to the "family" to which he had expressed so much devotion. He had gone over at once to the side of the new master of the house. He had felt no indignation towards the interloper, nor any partisanship on behalf of Paul. He came up now with his most obsequious air, as Gus came out of the drawing-room.

"I beg your pardon, Sir Augustus, but Mr. Paul has come."

"Oh, he has come, has he?" Gus said.

Brown stood respectfully ready, as if he would undertake at the next word to turn Mr. Paul out of the house; no wonder Lady Markham was indignant. Gus

understood it all now—the headaches and the deserted tea-table. No doubt the mother and sister were with Paul, comforting and consoling him. He gave forth a little sigh when he thought of it. Whatever might happen, no one would ever console him in that way. Paul had always the better of him, even when disinherited. But when they went into the drawing-room before dinner, he was very anxious to be friendly to Paul. He went up to him holding out his hand.

“I am very glad that we meet like this,” he said. “Your mother has taken me in, for which I am grateful to her; and I am very glad that we have met. I hope you will not think any worse of me than you can help.”

“I do not think worse of you at all,” Paul said, briefly; but he would not enter into conversation. And the whole party were silent. Whether it was the influence of the son’s return, who was nothing now but a secondary person in the house where he had been the chief, or whether there was any other cause beside, Gus could not tell. Even the mother and daughter did not talk to each other. When dinner was over, and Mr. Brown, with his too observant eyes, was got rid of, the forlorn little stranger, who was the new baronet, the conqueror, the master of the situation, could almost have wept, so lonely and left out did he feel.

“Is anything going to happen?” he said. “I know I am no better than an outsider among you, but I would like to enter into everything that concerns you, if you would let me. Is anything going to happen?”

“I don’t know of anything that is going to happen,” said Paul; and the ladies said nothing. There was no longer that intercourse of looks between them, of half-words and rapid allusions, which Gus admired. They sat, each wrapped as in a cloud of her own. And rarely had a night of such confused melancholy and depression been spent at Markham. Alice, who feared to encounter any examination by her mother, went upstairs again,

scarcely entering the drawing-room at all. And Lady Markham sat alone amid all the soft, yet dazzling, lights, which again seemed to blaze as they had blazed when Sir William was dying, suggesting the tranquil household peace which seemed now over for ever. Was it over for ever? The very room in which she was seated was hers no longer. Her son was hers no longer, but about to be lost to her—separated by wide seas, and still more surely by other associations, and the severance of the heart. And even Alice—Lady Markham could not reconcile herself to the thought that while her husband was dying, and she watching by his side, Alice had allowed herself to be drawn into a new life and new thoughts. It seemed an impiety to him who was gone. Everything was impiety to him: the stranger in his place, though that stranger was his son; the shattering of his image, though it was his own hand that had done it; the dispersion of his children. Thank God! there were still the little ones. She thought, with a forlorn pang in her heart, that she would withdraw herself with them to the contracted life of the Dower-house, and there reconstruct her domestic temple. Bell and Marie, Harry and Roland, would retain the idea of their father unimpaired, as Paul and Alice could not do. But what does it matter that all is well with the others when one of your children is in trouble? it is always the lean kine that swallow up those that are fat and flourishing. Her heart was so sore with the present that she could not console herself with the future. How could it be that Job was comforted with other sons and daughters, instead of those he had lost? How many a poor creature has wondered over this! Can one make up for another? Lady Markham sat all alone, half suffocated with unshed tears. Paul was going away, and she had not the courage to go to Alice, to question her, to hear that in heart she also had gone away. Thus she sat disconsolate in the drawing-room, while Gus took possession of the library. The poor little gentleman

was still sadder than Lady Markham; not so unhappy, but sadder, not knowing what to do with himself. The long evening alone appalled him. He took a book, but he was not very fond of reading. The children had gone to bed. He went to the window once, and, looking out, saw a red spark, moving about among the trees, of Paul's cigar. Probably, if he joined him, it would only be to feel more the enormity of his own existence. Gus went back to his chair, and drawing himself close to the fire (which Mr. Brown had caused to be lighted, reflecting that Sir Augustus was a foreigner, and might feel chilly), fell asleep there, and so spent a forlorn evening all by himself. Was this what he had come to England for, to struggle for his rights, and make everybody unhappy? It was not a very lofty end after all.

And next day there was so much to be settled. Paul was astir early, excited and restless, he could not tell why. It seemed to him that one way or other his fate was to be settled that day. If Janet Spears clung to him, if she insisted on keeping her hold upon him, what was he to do? He went down very early to the village, wandering about all the places he had known. He had never been very genial in his manners with the poor people, but yet he had been known to them all his life, and received salutations on all sides. Some of them still called him Sir Paul. They knew he was not his father's successor—that there was another and altogether new name in the Markham family—but the good rustics, many of them, could not make out how, once having been Sir Paul to their certain consciousness, he could ever cease to bear that title. The name brought back to the young man's mind the flash of finer feeling, the subdued and sorrowful elation with which he had walked about these quiet roads on the morning of his father's funeral. He had meant to lead a noble life among these ancestral woods. All that his father was and more, he had intended to be. He had meant to

show his gratitude for having escaped from the snare of those follies of his youth which had nearly cast him away, by tolerance and help to those who were like himself. In politics, in the management of the people immediately within his influence, he had meant to give the world assurance of a man. But now that was all over. In his place was poor little Gus : and he himself had neither influence nor power. What a change it was ! He strayed into the churchyard to his father's grave, still covered with flowers, and then—why not ?—he thought he would go up to the rectory and ask them to give him some breakfast. Though he did not care enough for Gus to avoid his presence, yet it was a restraint ; there never, he thought, could be any true fellowship between them. He went and tapped at the window of the breakfast-room which he knew so well, and where Dolly was making the tea. She opened it to him with a little cry of pleasure. Dolly had not made any pretence of putting on mourning when Sir William died, but ever since she had worn her black frock ; nobody could reproach her with encroaching upon the privileges of the family by this, for a black frock was what any one might wear ; but Paul, who was ignorant, was touched by her dress. She had been looking pale when she stood over the table with the tea-caddy, but when she saw who it was Dolly bloomed like a winter-rose. It was October now, the leaves beginning to fall, and a little fire made the room bright, though the weather was not yet cold enough for fires. Paul had never once considered himself in love with Dolly in the old days. Perhaps it was only the contrast between her and Janet Spears that moved him now. He knew that one way or other the question about Janet Spears would have to be concluded before the day was done ; and this consciousness made Dolly fairer and sweeter to him than ever she had been before.

And the rector was very glad to see Paul. He

understood the young man's early visit at once. Mr. Stainforth had never entertained any doubt on the subject. To talk over his affairs with a man of experience and good sense must be a very different thing from discussing them with ladies, however sensible; and he plunged into good advice to the young man almost before he began his tea.

"There is one thing I am certain you ought to do," Mr. Stainforth said, "I told your mother so yesterday. I am an old man and I cannot stand long in any one's way. Paul, you must take orders; that is what you must do: and succeed me in the living. It is a thing which has always been considered an excellent provision for a second son; among your own people—and you know that this is an excellent house. Dolly will show you all over it. For a man of moderate tastes it is as good as Markham, and not expensive to keep up. And as for the duty, depend upon it, my dear boy, you would find no difficulty about that. Why, Dolly does the most part of the parish work. Of course you could not have Dolly," said the old man, at his ease, not thinking of how the young ones felt, "but somebody would turn up. It is a good position and it is not a hard life. As soon as I heard what had happened I said to myself, at once, the living is the very thing for Paul."

Paul could not help a furtive glance round him, a momentary review of the position, a rapid imperceptible flash of his eyes towards Dolly, who sat very demurely in front of the tea-urn. How glad she was of that tea-urn! But he shook his head.

"I am afraid I shall not be able to settle myself so easily as that," he said.

"But why not, why not?" asked the old man; and he went on expatiating upon the advantages of this step. "I would retire as soon as you were ready. I have often thought of retiring. It is Dolly rather than I that has wanted to remain. Dolly seems to think that she cannot live away from Markham Royal."

"Oh, no, papa," Dolly cried, "it was only because there was no reason. I could live—anywhere."

"I know what you will do," said the old man, "when I am gone, you will come back and flutter like a little ghost about your schools and your poor people: you will think nobody can manage them but yourself; unless you marry, you know—unless you marry. That would make a difference. For the peace of the new rector I must get you married, Dolly, before I receive notice to quit, my dear."

And he laughed with his old shrill laugh, not thinking what might be going on in those young bosoms. That Dolly should marry anybody was a joke to her father, and that Paul should have any feeling on the subject never occurred to him. He cackled and laughed at his own joke, and then he became serious, and once more impressed all the advantages of the living upon his visitor. The curious mingling of confusion, embarrassment, distress, and pleasure with which the two listened it would be difficult to describe. Even Dolly, though she was abashed and horrified by the two simple suggestions which the old man neither intended nor dreamt of, felt a certain vague shadowy pleasure in it, as of a thing that never could come true but yet was sweet enough as a dream; and because of the tea-urn which hid her from Paul, felt safe, and was almost happy in the thrill of consciousness which ran to her finger tips. They did not see each other, either of them: and this was a thing which was impossible, never to be. But yet it put them by each other's side as if they were going to set out upon life together, and the sensation was sweet.

Paul turned it over and over in his head as he went home. It was not the life he would have chosen, but the old man's materialistic view of it had for the moment a charm. The sheltered quiet life, the mild duty, the ease and leisure, with no struggle or trouble to attain to them—was it a temptation? He laughed

out as he asked himself the question. No! Paul might perhaps have been a missionary after the apostolic model; but a clergyman with very little to do and a wife to do the great part of that little for him—no, he said to himself, no! And then he sighed—for the rectory, under those familiar skies, and little Dolly, whom he had known since she was a baby, were very sweet.

It was something very different for which he had to prepare himself now. As he walked towards home he suddenly came in sight, as he turned the village corner into the high road, of a pair who were walking on before him from the station. Paul's heart gave a sudden leap in his breast, but not with joy. He stood still for a moment, then went on, making no effort to overtake them. A man and a woman plodding along the dusty road: he with the long strides and clumsy gait of one who was quite destitute of that physical training which gives to the upper classes so much of their superiority, his arms swinging loosely from his shoulders; she encumbered with the skirt of her dress, which trailed along the dusty road. The sun was high by this time, and very warm, and they felt it. Paul did not take his eyes from them as they went along, but he made no effort to make up to them. This was what he had played with in the time of his folly—what he thought he had chosen, without ever choosing it. What could he do, what could he do, he cried out in his heart with the vehemence of despair, to be clear of it now?

Spears had come to settle his accounts with Paul. In the course of the negotiation which had gone so far, which had gone indeed as far as anything could go not to be settled and concluded, he had received money from the young man for his share of the emigration capital. That Paul, when he separated himself from the party meant to leave this with them as a help to them, there was no doubt; and this was one reason why he had avoided meeting with his old associates, or ending formally the

connection between them. And when Spears demanded that a place of meeting should be appointed, Paul had with reluctance decided upon Markham as a half-way house, where he would have the help of his mother to smooth down and mollify the demagogue. Spears had been deeply compunctious for the part he had taken against Paul in London, but was also deeply wounded by Paul's refusal to accept his self-humiliation; and his object in seeking him now was not, as Paul thought, to reproach him for his desertion, nor was it to call him to account on the subject of Janet. Paul himself was not sufficiently generous, not noble enough to understand the proud and upright character of the humble agitator, who carried the heart of a prince under his working man's clothes, and to whom it was always more easy to give than to take. Spears was coming with a very different purpose. With the greatest trouble and struggle he had managed to reclaim, and separate from the other money collected, the sum paid by Paul. It had been not only a wonderful blow to his personal pride and his affections, but it diminished greatly his importance among his fellows when it was discovered that the young aristocrat, of whose adhesion they were inconsistently proud, was no longer under the influence or at the command of Spears; and it had cost him not only a great deal of trouble to collect Paul's money, but a sacrifice of something of his own; and he had so little! Nevertheless, he had it all in his pocket-book when he prepared that morning to keep the rendezvous which Paul had unwillingly given him.

Spears did not know till the last moment that his daughter meant to accompany him. She walked to the station with him, and took his ticket for him, and he suspected nothing. It was not until she joined him in the railway carriage that he understood what she meant, and then it was too late to remonstrate. Besides, his daughter told him it was Lady Markham she was going to see. Lady Markham had been very kind

to her. It was right that she should go to say goodbye; "and besides, you know, father—" Janet said. Yes, he knew, but he did not know much; and Janet was aware, as Paul was not, that her father was far too delicate, far too proud, to speak on her behalf. He would scorn to recall his daughter to any one who had forgotten her; if there was anything to be done for Janet, it was herself who must do it. And Spears was so uncertain about the whole business, so unaware of what she was going to do, that he did not even try to prevent her. He accepted her society accordingly, and did not attempt to resist her will. She had a right, no doubt, to look after her own affairs; and he who did not even know what these affairs were, what could he say? They had a very silent journey, finding little to say to each other. His mind was full of saddened and embittered affection, and of a proud determination not to be indebted to a friend who had deserted him. "Rich gifts grow poor when givers prove unkind," he was saying to himself. Undoubtedly it had given him importance, the fact that the richest of all the colonists was under his influence, and ready to do whatever he might suggest. Not for a moment, however, would Spears let this weigh with him. Yet it made his heart all the sorer in spite of himself. As for Janet, she had a still more distinct personal arrangement on her hands. They scarcely exchanged a word as they walked all that way along the high road, and up the avenue, Paul following, though they did not see him. In the hall, Janet separated herself from her father.

"It is Lady Markham *I* want to see," she said, with a familiarity and decision which amazed her father, who knew nothing about her previous visit. Janet recognised the footman Charles who had admitted her before. "You know that Lady Markham will see me," she said; "show me to Lady Markham's room, please."

Spears did not understand it, but he looked on with a vague smile. He himself was quite content to wait

in the hall until Paul should appear. He was standing there vaguely remarking the things about him when Paul made his appearance. He gave his former friend his hand, but there was little said between them. Paul took him into the library which for the moment was vacant. It seemed to him that it would be easier to answer questions there where already he had often suffered interrogation and censure. And he did not know—he could not divine what Spears was about to say.

“When do you go?” the young man said.

“We have everything settled to sail on the 21st. That is five days from now.”

“I fear,” said Paul, “it must have been very inconvenient for you coming here. I am sorry, very sorry, you have taken so much trouble. I should have gone to you, but my mind has been in a whirl; the whole thing looks to me like a dream.”

“It is a dream that has given some of your friends a great deal of trouble. Take care, my good fellow, another time how you fall into dreams like this. It is best to take a little more trouble at the beginning to know your own mind,” he said slowly, tugging at his pocket. “But after all you came to yourself before there was any harm done, Markham. If it had happened in the middle of the ocean, or when we had got to our destination, it would have been still more awkward. As it was, it has been possible to recover your property,” said Spears, at last producing a packet out of its receptacle with a certain glow of suppressed disdain in his countenance. He got out a little bag of money as he spoke, and laid it on the table, then produced his pocket-book, which he opened, and took something out.

“What does this mean, Spears?”

“It means what is very simple, Paul—mere A B C work, as you should know. It is the amount of your subscriptions—what you have contributed in one way

or another. I won't trouble you with 'the items,' he said; "they are all on a piece of paper with the bank notes. And now here is the whole affair over," said Spears with the motion of snapping his fingers, "and no harm done. Few young men are able to say as much of their vagaries. Perhaps if you had involved yourself with a higher class, with people more like yourself, it might not have been equally easy to get away."

"But this is impossible! this cannot be!" cried Paul. "I intended nothing of the kind. Spears, you humble me to the dust. You must not—it is not possible that I can accept this. I intended—I made sure——"

"You meant to leave us yourself, but to let your money go as alms to the revolutionaries?" cried Spears, with a thrill of agitation in his voice which seemed to make the room ring. "Yes, I suppose you might have fallen among people who would have permitted it. (The strange thing was that most of the members of the society had been of this opinion, and that it was all that Spears could do to rescue the money which the others thought lawfully forfeited.) But we are not of that kind. We don't want filthy money with the man away, or even with his heart away."

The orator held his head high; there was a certain scorn about his gestures, about his mouth. He tried to show by a careless smile and air that what he was doing was of no importance, an easy and certain step of which there could be no doubt; but the thrill of excited feeling in him could not be got out of his voice. And Paul, perhaps, had even more excuse for excitement.

"I will not take a farthing of the money," he said.

"Then you will carry it back yourself, my lad. I have washed my hands of it. If you think I will permit a penny of yours to go into our treasury apart from yourself and your sympathy and your help! I would have taken all that and welcome. I have told you already—to little use—what you were to me, Paul

Markham. The Bible is right after all about idols, though many is the word I've spoken against it. I made an idol of you, and lo! my image is broken into a thousand pieces. It is like giving the thing a kick the more," he said, with a sudden burst of harsh laughter, "to think when it was all over and ended that I would take the money! It shows how much you knew me."

"Then it is a mere matter of personal offence and disappointment, Spears?"

"Offence!" he cried. "Yes, offence if you like the word—as it is offence when your friend puts a knife into you. The first thing you feel is surprise. Who could believe it? He! to stab you, when you were leaning upon him. It takes all a man's credulity to believe that. But when it is done—" he added with one of the sudden smiles which used to illuminate his rugged countenance, but now lighted it up with a gleam of angry melancholy, just touched with humour, "you don't take money from him, Paul."

"Nor does he take it from you," said Paul, quickly. "Spears, this is all folly. It is not a matter of passion, as you make it. Say I am as much in the wrong as you like. I did not know my own mind. I have had enough to go through in the last six weeks to teach me many things more important than my own mind. I can't go with you; I have found out that—but what then? I don't lose my interest in you; we don't cease to be friends. As for stabbing you, putting a knife into you—that is ludicrous," he cried, with an angry laugh. "It is like a couple of lovers in a French novel; not two Englishmen and friends."

"I'll tell you what, Paul," said the other, taking no notice; "if all had been going well with you, why I could have put up with it. A place like this makes a man think. I've told you so before. It's like being a prince on a small scale. Had I been born a prince I might have been a tyrant, but I shouldn't have

abandoned my throne ; and no more would you, I always thought, if you once felt the charm of it. But when all that was over, Paul, when you had lost everything, come down from your high estate, and felt," cried Spears, with an outburst of vehement feeling, "the burning and the bitterness of disappointment, that you should have abandoned us, and the cause, and me—your friend and father, *then !*"

He turned away, and walked from end to end of the long room. As for Paul, he did not say a word. What could he say ? how could he explain that it was precisely then, when he had lost everything, that those strange companions had become most intolerable to him. They were bearable when his choice of them was a folly, and his own position utterly different from theirs ; but as the distance lessened, the breach grew more apparent. This however he could not say. Nor had he a word to answer when Spears called himself his father. What did it mean ? and where was Janet, whom he had seen entering the house, but who had disappeared ? Paul's thoughts veered away from the chief subject of the interview, while Spears, walking up and down the room, talked on. The money lay on the table, neither taking any further notice of it. It was found there by Gus when he came in an hour after, lying upon the table in the same spot. Gus thought it a temptation to the servants, and threw it into a drawer. He was not used to careless dealing with money, and he looked out very curiously at the strange man who was walking up and down the avenue with Paul, talking much and gesticulating largely. This was a kind of man altogether apart from all Sir Gus's experiences, and his curiosity was much exercised. Was it perhaps an electioneering agent come here to talk of the representation of Farborough and Sir William's vacant seat ? Gus stood at the window and watched, for he had a great deal of curiosity, with very keen eyes.

CHAPTER XLI.

ALICE and her mother kept apart for one night. They said good-night to each other hurriedly, the one too much wounded to ask, the other too proud to offer, her confidence. But when they had done this they had reached the length of their respective tethers. Next morning the girl stole into her mother's room before any one was awake, and clinging about her, begged her pardon—for what she did not say. And Lady Markham kissed her and forgave her, though there was nothing to forgive. Words after all are the poorest exponents of meaning; they knew a great deal better what it was than if they had put it into words. And it was not till long after this reunion that Lady Markham said, quite accidentally, "Why did you not tell me Mr. Fairfax's secret, Alice? He seems to be much in earnest about it, poor boy."

Said Alice, very seriously, "How could I speak to you, mamma, about anything so—about anything that I was not obliged to speak of, at such a time?"

"Oh, my dear, that is true, that is most true. But it hurt me a little, for it made me feel as if—you were keeping something from me."

"We all like Mr. Fairfax," said Alice, courageously, "but it does not matter, does it, about his family? He was very good, very kind, at a time when we needed help; but to tell you about his want of a grandfather——"

Feeling safe in the smile which such a want would naturally call forth, Alice (rashly) ventured to meet her mother's eyes. And then to her confusion, the former accident repeated itself, notwithstanding every precaution. It is very difficult indeed to take precautions against such accidents. Once more an exasperating,

but unpreventable blush, of doubly died crimson, hot, sudden, scorching, flamed over Alice's face.

Lady Markham saw it, and felt the shock thrill through her again; but she was wise and took no notice. She shook her head. "I am not so sure about that," she said. "It is always of consequence to know to whom your friends belong. I wish—I wish——"

But what she was going to say—whether to wish for a grandfather to Fairfax, or to wish that she had not opened her house to him, could never be known; for just then Mrs. Martin opened the door with a little impatience and annoyance, and begged to know whether her lady was expecting again the young person who had been at Markham some time ago—a young person who insisted that Lady Markham would be sure to see her, and of whom Mrs. Martin evidently did not at all approve—by name Spears.

Lady Markham cast a hurried glance at Alice. It was her turn now to blush. "You can bring her in," she said. Then a few words were hastily exchanged between the mother and daughter. Alice seized upon some needlework which lay by. Sheltered by that, she drew her seat away towards the window out of her mother's immediate neighbourhood. Janet came in with a free and familiar step. She was elated by the readiness of her reception, the power of once more crowing over the important and dignified Mrs. Martin, and with something else which she was aware enhanced her own position still more. She came quickly in, and, without any of the timidity and awe of her first appearance, advanced to Lady Markham with outstretched hand, and a countenance covered with smiles; but notwithstanding, with instantaneous quickness noticed Alice, and felt that to be thus made acquainted with Miss Markham added another glory still. Was it not treating her as one of the family? When Janet saw this she determined to sell her consent to become one of the family still more dear.

"How do you do, my lady?" she said. "I thought as father was coming to see Mr. Paul I might just as well come too and see your ladyship, and speak about—the business that is between you and me."

Here Janet, delighted to feel herself so entirely at home, took a chair and drew it close to the table at which Lady Markham had been seated. She put her umbrella down against the table, and undid the fastening of her mantle.

"We have walked all the way from the station," she said, with engaging ease, "and it was so hot."

Lady Markham did not know what to say; the words were taken out of her mouth. She seated herself also, humbly, and looked at her visitor, who had made so wonderful an advance in self-confidence since she saw her first.

"Your father—has come with you?" she said.

"He thinks it is me that has come with him, my lady," said Janet. Then she looked pointedly at Alice bending over her work against the window. "I may speak before the young lady? I would not wish what I've got to say to go any further—not out of the family," she said.

"It is my daughter," said Lady Markham. "Alice, this is the daughter of Mr. Spears."

Janet smiled, and bowed her head graciously. She was in a state of great suppressed elation and excitement.

"I don't need to ask," she said, "my lady, if you followed my advice?"

"Your advice?"

"About Sir Paul; it answered very quick, didn't it? I thought that would bring him to his senses. Father is as vexed! he thinks it is all my fault, but I never pretended different. A gentleman that has everything he can set his face to, and a title, and a beautiful property, why should he emigrate? But now there is something else that I've come to ask you about."

"Do you mean that my son—has given up the idea?" Lady Markham could scarcely articulate the words.

"Oh, yes, bless you, as soon as ever you let him know that it would not make any difference. I knew very well that was what he meant all along. What should he go abroad for, a gentleman with his fortune? it was all nonsense. And Lady Markham," said Janet, solemnly, "it would be mean to leave him in the lurch, I know, after all that; but still, I've got myself to look to. I don't understand what all this story is about a new gentleman, and him, after all, not having anything. I can't feel easy in my mind about it. I like Sir Paul the best, and always will; but I've had another very good offer. It's too serious to play fast and loose with," said Janet, gravely, "it's something as I must take or leave. Now there is nobody but you, my lady, that will tell me the truth. He is Sir Paul, ain't he? he has got the property? I wouldn't take it upon me to ask such questions if it wasn't that I am, so to speak, one of the family. And as for father—I can't put no confidence in what father says."

Alice got up hurriedly from her chair and threw down her work; it was a mere movement of impatience, but to Janet every movement meant something. She kept her eyes upon the young lady who might, for anything she could tell, be in a conspiracy to keep the truth from her.

"Father thinks of nothing but love," she said, following Alice with her eyes, "but there's more in marriage than that. I can't trust in father to tell me true."

"What is it you want me to tell you?" said Lady Markham, trembling with eagerness.

She would have told her—almost anything that was not directly false. She began to frame in her mind a description of Paul's disinheritance, but she feared to spoil her case by too great anxiety. As for Alice, she stood by the window pale, speechless, indignant—too

wildly angry on Paul's account to perceive what her mother saw so plainly, that here was a chance of escape for Paul.

"Well, just the truth, my lady," said Janet, "if it is true what folks are saying. I can't believe it's true. You are Lady Markham, I never heard anything against that, and he is your eldest. But they say he is not Sir Paul and hasn't the property. I can't tell how that can be."

"It is true, though," said Lady Markham, speaking low; even when there was an excellent use for it, it was not easy to repeat all the wrongs that her son had borne. "My son is not Sir Paul," she said, "nor has he the Markham estates. He has an elder brother who has inherited everything. This has only been quite certain for two or three days. My boy—who had every prospect of being rich—is now poor. That is very grievous for him; but to those who love him," said the indiscreet woman, her heart triumphing over her reason, "he is not changed; he is all he ever was, and more."

"Neither the property nor the title?" said Janet, with a blank countenance. "Poor instead of being rich? Oh, it is not a thing to put up with—it is not to be borne! But I can't see how it can be," she cried; "poor instead of rich! If it wasn't for one or two things, I should think it was a plot to disgust me—to separate him and me."

"But," said Lady Markham—she had never perhaps in her life before spoken with the cold energy of a taunt, with that desperate calm of severity, yet trembling of suspense—"that is in your own hands, Miss Spears. If you love him, no one can separate him from you."

It was all she could do to get out the words; her breath went in the tumult of her heart.

"Oh—love him!" The trouble and disappointment on Janet's face were quite genuine; every line in her countenance fell. "You know as well as I do that's

not everything, Lady Markham. You may like a man well enough; but when you were just thinking that all was settled, and everything as you could wish—and to find as he has nothing—not even the Sir to his name! Oh, it's too bad—it's too bad—it's cruel! I would not believe father, and I can hardly believe you."

"It is true, however," Lady Markham said.

She watched the girl with a keenness of contempt, yet a breathless gasp of hope—emotions more intense than she had almost ever known before. She was fighting for her son's deliverance—she who had delivered him into the toils. As for Alice, she stood with her face pressed against the window, and her hands upon her ears. She did not want either to hear or to see.

"Well!" said Janet, with a long breath, too deep for a sigh. "I am glad I came," she added after a moment; "I would never have believed it, never! And I'm sure I am sorry for him—very, very sorry. After giving up the colony for my sake, and all! But I could not be expected to ruin all my prospects, could I, my lady? And me that had set my heart on being Lady Markham like you!" she cried, clasping her hands. This was a bitter reflection to Janet; her eyes filled with tears. "I don't know how I can face him to say 'No' to him," she went on; "he will take it so unkind. But if you consider that I have another offer—a very good offer—plenty of money, and no need for me to trouble my head about anything. That would be different—very different from anybody that married Mr. Paul now."

"Very different, Miss Spears. My son's wife would be a poor woman; she would have to struggle with poverty and care. And it would be all the worse because he is not used to poverty; indeed, he could not marry—he has no money at all. She would have to wait for years and years."

"Oh, it's too bad—it's too bad—it's cruel!" cried Janet once more. Then she relapsed into a grateful

sense of her escape. "But I am very glad I came. I never would have believed it from any one but you. Oh, dear, oh, dear!" cried Janet again, "what a downfall for him, poor young gentleman—and he that was always so proud! I won't say nothing to him, Lady Markham, not to make him feel it more. I will give out that I only came with father, and to see you, and ask you if you will recommend our shop. Now that all this is settled, I may as well tell you that I've almost quite made up my mind to marry Mosheer Lisiere, the new partner at our shop. He is a French gentleman, but he's very well off, and very clever in the business. I think I cannot do better than take him," said Janet, adding with a sigh the emphatic monosyllable, "*now*."

Notwithstanding, however, that this was so comfortably settled, Janet turned round upon Lady Markham, who was going down stairs with her to make sure that Paul had no hankering after this sensible young woman, and to keep the government of the crisis generally in her own hands. Janet turned round upon her as they were going out of the room.

"But he will have your money?" she said.

"His sisters," said Lady Markham, with a little gasp, for she had not expected this assault, and was not prepared for it—"his sisters," she said "will have my money."

Janet looked at her searchingly, and then, convinced at last, went slowly down stairs. She had lost something. Never more was she likely to have the chance of being my lady—never would she strike awe into the bosoms of the servants who had looked so suspiciously on her by returning as young Lady Markham. On the other hand, there was a satisfaction in being able to see her own way clear before her. She was very thoughtful, but she was not dissatisfied with her morning's work. Supposing she had gone so far as to marry Paul Markham, a gentleman (she used the word now in her thoughts as an expression of contempt) without a penny! Janet

shivered at the thought. Instead of that, she would step at once into a good house with a cook and a housemaid, and everything handsome about her. She was very glad that she had come to Lady Markham and insisted on knowing the truth.

As for Lady Markham, she was still quivering with the conflict out of which she had come victorious. But triumph was in her heart. She could afford now to be magnanimous. "You went away without any refreshment the last time you were here," she said graciously, as she followed her visitor down stairs; "but you must take some luncheon with us to-day, your father and you."

"Oh, thank you, my lady," Janet cried, forgetting her dignity. This of itself almost repaid her for giving up Paul.

Lady Markham did not forget Janet's request to see the house, which had been so boldly made when the girl had thought herself Paul's future wife. She took her into the great drawing-room with a little gleam of malicious pleasure, to show her what she had lost, and watched her bewildered admiration and awe. By this time the happiness of knowing that her son was not going to forsake her had begun to diffuse itself through Lady Markham's being like a heavenly balsam, soothing all her troubles. When they met going into the dining-room as the luncheon-bell rang, she put her hand within his arm, holding it close to her side for one moment of indulgence.

"You are not going away," she said in his ear. "Thank God! Oh, why did you not make me happy sooner—why did you not tell me, Paul?"

"Going away," he said perplexed, "of course I am going away." And then her real meaning crossed him. "What, with Spears?" he said. "There has not been any thought of that for many a day."

Spears talked little at this meal; he was full of the discouragement and mournful anger of disappointment

Up to the last moment he had hoped that Paul would change his mind—perhaps on the ground of his supposed love for Janet, if nothing else. But Paul had said nothing about Janet. He did not understand it, but it made his heart sore. The rest of the party were embarrassed enough, except Gus, who still thought this man with the heavy brows was an electioneering agent yet did not like to tackle him much, lest he should show his own ignorance of English policy—(“Decidedly I must read the papers and form opinions,” Gus said to himself); and Janet, who, seated at this beautiful table, with the flowers on it and all the sparkling glass and silver, and Charles waiting behind her chair, was sparkling with delight and pride. She was seated by the side of Sir Augustus, and spoke to him, calling him by that name. The dishes which were handed to her by the solemn assiduity of Mr. Brown were food for the gods, she thought, though they were simple enough. She made notes of everything for her own future guidance. It was just possible, M. Lisiere had said, that he might keep a page to wait upon his wife; thus the glory of a “manservant” might still be hers. In imagination she framed her life on the model of Markham; and so full was her mind of these thoughts that Janet scarcely noticed Paul, who, on his side, paid no attention to her. As for Lady Markham, she was the soul of the party. She almost forgot her recent sorrow, and the sight of Sir Augustus at the other end of the table did not subdue her as usual. She asked Spears questions about his journey with the very wantonness of relief—that journey which she had shuddered to hear named, which had overshadowed her mind night and day was like a dead lion to her; she could smile at it now.

“Ay, my lady, that’s how it’s going to end,” said Spears. “I don’t say that it’s the way I could have wished. There was a time when the thought of new soil and a fresh start was like a new life to me. But perhaps it’s only because the time is so close, and a

crisis has something in it that makes you think. It's a kind of dying, though it's a kind of new living too. Everything is like that, I suppose—one state ends and the other begins. We don't know what we are going to, but we know what we're giving up. Paul there—you see he has changed his mind. He had a right to change his mind if he liked—I am saying nothing against it. But that's another sort of dying to me."

"Oh, Mr. Spears, do not say so. To me it is new life. Did not I tell you once, if we were in trouble, if we needed him to stand by us (God knows I little thought how soon it would come true!), that my boy would never forsake his family and his position then? Paul might have left us prosperous," said his mother with tears in her eyes, "but he would never leave us in sorrow and trouble. Mr. Spears, I told you so."

And who can doubt that she spoke (and by this time felt) as if her confidence in Paul had never for a moment flagged, but had always been determined and certain as now?

And Spears looked at her with the respect of a generous foe who owned himself vanquished. "And so you did," he said. "I remember it all now. My lady, you knew better—you were wiser than I."

"Oh, not wiser," she said, still magnanimous; "but it stands to reason that I should know my own boy better than you."

Again he looked at her, respectful, surprised, half convinced; perhaps it was so. After all his pride and sense of power, perhaps it was true that the simplest might know better than he. He let a great sigh escape from his breast, and rose in his abstraction from the table, without waiting for the mistress of the house, which it was usually part of his careful politeness to do.

"We must be going," he said; "our hours are numbered. Good-bye, my Lady Markham; you are a woman that would have been a stronghold to us in

my class. I am glad I ever knew one like you ; though you will not say the same of me."

"Do not say that, Mr. Spears," said Lady Markham again. It was true she had often been disposed to curse his name ; and yet she would have said as he had said—she was glad she had ever known one like him. She put out her hand to him with a genuine impulse of friendship, and did not wince even when it was engulfed and grasped as in a vice by his strong and resolute hand.

"God bless you, my lady," he said, looking at her with a little moisture coming by hard pressure into the corners of his eyes.

"And God bless you too, Mr. Spears—my friend," she said with a hesitation that almost made the words more expressive, and her long eyelashes suddenly grew all bedewed and dewy, and shone with tears. The demagogue wrung the delicate hand of the great lady, and strode away out of the house, paying no attention to the calls of his daughter, who was not quite ready to follow him. Paul rose too, and accompanied them silently down the avenue. Janet talked a little, chiefly to assure her father there was no hurry, and to upbraid him with hurrying her away. At the gate Spears turned round and took Paul by the hands.

"Come no further," he said. "She knew better than I. She said you would never forsake your post, and I don't deny your post is here. I am glad to be convinced of it, lad, for it lets me think well of you, and better than ever. It goes against me to say it, Paul ; but if your heart melts to me after I am gone, you may tell yourself Spears was the happier to think it was your duty that kept you after all. If you should never hear of me again——"

"But I shall hear of you again, and often," cried Paul, with an emotion he had never anticipated, grasping the other's hand.

"God knows," said Spears; "but I'm glad I came. Good-bye."

And again he strode away, leaving Janet to follow, and Paul standing looking after him, with a sudden pang in his heart.

Fairfax was coming along the road very seriously—coming to know his fate too. He paused, surprised, at the sight of the pair. But Spears took little notice of Fairfax. He gave him a grasp of his hand in passing, and said, "Good-bye, my lad," with a clear voice. The young man stopped for a moment to look after them; then went on to where Paul was standing, somewhat dreamily, looking after them too.

"I feel as if I had lost a friend," Paul said, "though he has done me more harm than good, I suppose. He has brought me back my money, Fairfax; he will not take a penny from me; and that will be all the worse for him among those others. What can I do?"

"Leave it to me," said Fairfax—it was a way he had; "and good-bye to an honest soul. I am glad that ugly place in Clerkenwell is not the last place I have seen him in."

Paul's countenance darkened. "I wish you had not reminded me of that," he said.

And they walked up to the house together, saying little more. Fairfax had but little leisure to think of Spears. He was going to his own trial, and he did not know how he was to come out of it. The court had sat upon his case for the last twenty-four hours, and no doubt had come to a final decision. It would have been an important subject indeed which could have done more than touch the edge of his anxious mind. Paul left him in the hall; and Mr. Brown, divining that something more was going on, and having, as has been said, a well-founded and favourable estimate of Fairfax, for reasons of his own, showed him with great solemnity into the sanctuary where Lady Markham sat alone. She did not rise to meet him, but smiled, and held out

her left hand to him, with the pretty French fashion of acknowledging intimacy. It was a good sign. He went up very eagerly to the beautiful, kind woman, in whose hands he felt was his fate.

"You find me quite *emotionnée*, she said, "parting from Mr. Spears. Yes, you may smile—but I was more like crying. I am sure he is a good man, though he may be—led astray."

"He is not led astray," said Fairfax; but then he remembered that it was not his business to plead any cause but his own. He looked at her wistfully, though there was always that under-gleam of humour in his eyes. "I have come up for sentence, Lady Markham," he said.

She smiled. "The sentence will not be very severe; there is not much harm done."

This was far worse than any severity could be. His countenance fell, sudden despondency filled his heart; and now the humour fled altogether from the mournful eyes with which he looked up into his judge's face.

This time Lady Markham almost laughed. "You do not seem pleased to hear it," she said. "I thought it might ease your mind."

"Oh, Lady Markham, do not jeer at me! You may think it does not matter, but to me——"

"It is sport to me, but death to you?" she said; "is that what you would say? No, Mr. Fairfax—no; not so bad as that. And you must pardon me if I am light-minded. I am happy. Paul is not going with those mad people; he is safe; he is free."

"I am very glad," said Fairfax, "but may I say that Paul is irrelevant just now? I have come up for my sentence. Is it to be banishment, or is it——? Ah, Lady Markham, tell me—is there any hope?"

"Mr. Fairfax," she said, with great gravity, "you ask me for leave to get my Alice from me, if you can; and then you tell me you are nobody, of no family, with

no connections. Pardon me; my only informant is yourself."

"It is true—quite true."

"Then," she said, and paused, "judge for me, Mr. Fairfax, what can I say?"

He made no reply, and there was an interval of silence, which was very heavy, very painful to Lady Markham's kind heart. She felt compelled to speak, because of that stillness of expectation which made the moment tragical.

"If," she said, faltering, "there had been time enough for real love to take possession of you—both of you—if it had come to *that*, that you could not be parted, it would be a different matter, Mr. Fairfax; but you have known each other so short a time, the plant cannot have very deep roots. Cannot you be brave, and pluck it up, and bear the wrench? In the end, perhaps, it would be better for you both."

"Better!" he cried, with a bitterness never heard before in his voice.

"Mr. Fairfax, God knows I do not want to be hard upon you. My poor boy, I am fond of you," she said, with a sudden, tender impulse; "but what can I say? A man who tells me he is obscure and humble, and not a match for her—am I to give my Alice up to a struggling, harassed life?"

"There is one thing I forgot to say, Lady Markham. It is of no consequence; it does not affect the question one way or another. Still, perhaps I ought to tell you. It is that I am ridiculously, odiously, abominably——"

"What?" she said, in alarm.

"Rich!" cried the young man. "You know the worst of me now."

CHAPTER XLII.

AFTER these events an interval of great quiet occurred at Markham. Paul went to town, where he was understood to be reading for the bar, like most other young men, or preparing for a public office—opinions being divided as to which it was. Naturally Sir William Markham's son found no difficulty in getting any opening into life which the mania of examination permitted. Indeed there were friends of his father's very anxious to get him into parliament, and "push him on" into the higher branches of the public service; but he had not yet sufficiently recovered from the rending and tearing of the past to make this possible. He was inseparable from one of his Oxford comrades, a young fellow whom nobody knew, a young Cræsus, the son of some City man, who had judiciously died and left him, unencumbered by any vulgar relations, with an immense fortune. It already began to be said by people who saw the young men together, that no doubt Lady Markham would be wise enough to secure this fine fortune for Alice; but at present, of course, in the first blackness of their mourning, nothing could be definitely arranged on this subject. Paul lived in London, at first moodily enough, resenting the great harm that had been done him, but afterwards not so badly on the whole. He had lost a great deal certainly, but not anything that takes the comfort out of actual life. He was as well lodged, and had his wants as comfortably supplied as if he had been Sir Paul Markham. Hard as his reverses had been upon him, they had not plunged him into privations, and indeed it is possible that young Paul in a public office would have as much real enjoyment of his life as any landed baronet or county magnate, perhaps more; but then for Paul, if he

wanted to "settle," for Paul married and middle-aged, the case would be very different; unless indeed he married money, which he showed very little inclination to do.

Spears sailed in the end of October with his younger daughters, Janet having first been married with much solemnity to her master at the shop, who gave her a very gorgeous house, with more gilding about it than any house in the neighbourhood, and dressed her so that she was a sight to see. Her father never pretended to understand the history of the tie which had been formed, he could not tell how, and broken in the same mysterious way. He had a vague consciousness that he ought to have done or said something in the matter, but how was he to do it? And all is well that ends well. Before the emigrants sailed, Fairfax appeared suddenly and renewed his anxious desire to take those shares in the undertaking which Spears had not permitted Paul to retain. Fairfax protested that it was as a speculation he did it, and that nowhere could he find a better way of investing his money. And though Spears was only half deceived, he was at the same time, in spite of himself, elated by this profession of confidence, which restored the *amour-propre* which had been so deeply wounded, and at the same time restored himself, as the controller of so large an amount of capital, to his right place among the adventurers. He would not have accepted a farthing from Paul, but from that easy-going fellow Fairfax all seemed so natural! Whatever happened *he* would not mind; but there could be little doubt that the estimate thus formed was entirely true.

Thus quiet fell upon Markham with the winter mists and rains. It was not cheerful there in the midst of the wet woods, when the dark weather closed in without any of the hospitalities and wholesome country diversions which make winter bright. Their sorrow and their mourning only began to reign supreme when all

the agitation was stilled, and Paul had settled into his strangely-changed existence, and Sir Augustus had become the master of the house. The only variety the family had was in a sudden visit from the Lennys, husband and wife, who had only heard of all that had passed on her return from a round of the cheap places on the Continent, which was their way of living when they had no visits to make. Mrs. Lenny knew, what so few of us know, where these cheap places were, and had eaten funny foreign dinners, and knew how to choose what was the best in them, in many an out-of-the-way corner. They had been in Germany and Switzerland, appearing now and then at a watering-place, as a seal comes to the surface to take breath. And it was not till nearly Christmas that they heard all that had happened. Mrs. Lenny came and threw herself upon Lady Markham's shoulder and wept. "If I had known, my dear lady, if I had known the trouble that was coming on your dear family through me and mine!" the good woman said. As for Colonel Lenny, he could not speak to Lady Markham, but went off with the boys, who were at home for the holidays, after one silent grasp of her hand; but his wife talked and cried, and cried and talked all the afternoon through.

"And don't blame poor Will Markham more than you can help," she said. "It was a baby when he left the island, and what does a young man think of a baby? It doesn't seem to count at all. And then my brother had adopted the little thing. It didn't seem as if it belonged to him."

This appeal to her on behalf of her own husband, wounded Lady Markham almost as much as blame.

"I understand how it was," she replied with proud stoicism; though even at that moment, in hearing him thus defended, there glanced across Lady Markham's mind a sense of the wrong he had done which was almost intolerable to her. Thus the mind works by contradiction, seeing most distinctly that which it is

called upon not to see. Afterwards, Mrs. Lenny told her the whole story of Gus's young mother, and her love and death, which she listened to with a strange feeling that she herself was the girl who was being talked of, who had died so young.

"He was no better than a lad himself," Mrs. Lenny said. "I don't doubt that it was like a dream to him. When Lenny and I talked to him first he did not seem to understand about the boy."

"You talked to him then—about—his son?"

"That was what we came for, surely," said Mrs. Lenny, "that was what we came for. We knew nothing about you, my dear lady, and we didn't know there was a family. When I heard of your fine young gentleman that was to be the heir,—God bless him!—you might have knocked me down with a straw; and I told Will he should make a clean breast of it. But do you think a man, and a great statesman, would take a woman's advice? They think they know better, and he would not. He thought nothing would ever happen, poor Will! And here it's come upon you like a tempest, without a word of warning."

"We will say no more about it," said Lady Markham.

If she could she would have obliterated the story from everybody's memory; instead of dwelling upon her wrongs it was her pride to ignore them. It was intolerable to her to think that all the world of her acquaintance must have discussed her and her husband, and all that had happened, as Mrs. Lenny, with the best of intentions and the kindest of thoughts, was doing. She put a stop to the conversation pointedly, leading her companion to other subjects, and though she was more kind to them than ever, and treated those kind and innocent Bohemians as if, Mrs. Lenny said, they had been the governor and his lady, she did not encourage any return to this subject. As for Gus, though he had scarcely any recollection of them, he was very glad to see these relations, who knew so much more about him

than any of his family did. Colonel Lenny was a god-send to him in the dark winter days. He could hardly make up his mind to let them go. But the Lennys were too much accustomed to wandering, and too determined, whatever might be wanting to them, that a little amusement never should be wanting, to relish the gloom of Markham in its mourning. When they went away, Mrs. Lenny whispered a solemn intimation, of which it was difficult to say whether it was a warning or a prophecy, into Lady Markham's ear. "He'll not stand it long," she said. Her note was half melancholy, half congratulatory, and she nodded and shook her head alternately, looking back as the carriage went down the avenue upon the group at the great door. Lady Markham, with a shawl round her, was as fair in her matronly beauty as ever, though a little paler than of old. She was not afraid of the chill, but stood there waving her hand to her departing guests till they were out of sight. But Sir Gus withdrew shivering to his fire, which roared up the chimney night and day, and could never be made big enough to please him. He could not understand what pleasure it could be to any one to encounter that chill air, laden with moisture, out of doors.

The fact was that the English winter was a terrible experience for Sir Gus. He had not contemplated anything so unlike all that he had previously known. He had heard of it, of course, and knew that there was cold to encounter such as he had never felt before, but he was not aware what were the consequences of that cold, either mental or bodily. He shrank visibly in the midst of his wrappings, and grew leaner and browner as the year went on, and sat shivering close by his great fire when the boys came in glowing with exercise, and the little girls, his favourites, with brilliant roses of winter on their cheeks. "Come out, come out, and you will get warm!" they all cried; but he would not leave his fire. A man more out of place in an English

country-house in a severe winter could not be. Gus could do nothing that the other gentlemen did. He neither hunted nor shot, nor even walked or rode. He did not understand English law or customs, to occupy himself with the duties of a magistrate; he did not care about farming; he knew nothing about the preserving of the game, or even the care of the woods. He was fretful when the agent or his clerk came to consult him on any of these subjects. Go out and look at the timber! he only wanted more to burn, to have better and better fires.

By this time the family at Markham had almost begun to forget that Gus was an intruder. There was no more question of Lady Markham's removal to the dower-house. Nothing had been said about it by one or the other, but it had been quietly, practically laid aside, as a visionary scheme impossible in the circumstances. They all lived together calmly, monotonously, in perfect family understanding. Even Alice, who stood out so long against him, had learned to accept Gus. The little girls made him their slave; he was always ready to do anything they wanted, to take them wherever they pleased. But life got to be very heavy upon Gus's hands as these winter days went on. He had nothing to do; he did not even read—that resource of the unoccupied; he had no letters to write, or business to do like his father, and he soon began to hate the library which had been appropriated to him, notwithstanding its huge fireplace. He was more at home in the soft brightness of the drawing-room, with velvet curtains drawn round him, and the lights reflected in the mirrors and sparkling on the pretty china and ornaments. The ladies found him in their territories more than in his own. He interrupted nothing, but notwithstanding, there, as everywhere, there was nothing for him to do. It was only now and then, not once a day at the most, that there was a skein of silk or of wool to hold for some one. Sometimes he would

volunteer to read aloud, but he soon tired of that. He bore this want of occupation very well on the whole, sitting buried in the big bamboo chair, which he had filled with soft cushions, at the corner of the fire in the drawing-room, looking on at all that was doing, and more interested in the needlework than those who worked at it. Poor little gentleman! Sir Gus did not even care for the newspapers; he looked at the little paragraphs of general interest, but turned with a grimace from the long reports of the debates. "What good does all that do me?" he said, when Lady Markham, who was somewhat horrified by his indifference, endeavoured to rouse him to a sense of his duties.

"But it concerns the country," she would say, "and few people have a greater stake in the country."

"That is how Paul would have felt," said Sir Gus; "he would have read all these speeches; he would have understood everything that is said. It would have mattered to him——"

"Indeed it matters to us all," said Lady Markham, with grave dignity. Of all people in the world to listen while a parliamentary debate is talked of with contempt, the wife of a man who was once a Cabinet minister is the last—and all the more if her husband held but a secondary place. She was half-offended and half-shocked; but Sir Gus could not see the error of his ways. He got all the picture-papers, which he enjoyed along with Bell and Marie, and sent to the boys after, when they were at school. He cared nothing about the game, except to eat it when it was set before him. From morn to chilly eve he would sit by that fire, and note everything that happened. Not a letter arrived but he was there to see how it was received, and what was in it. Lady Markham declared that had she heard anywhere else, or read in a book, of a man who was always in the drawing-room, who had no duties of his own, and who sat and watched everything, the situation would have seemed intolerable. But it was

not so intolerable in reality. They got used, at last, to the big bamboo chair and its inhabitant; they got used to his comments. There was no harm in Mr. Gus; but life was hard upon him. Everybody else was doing something—even the little girls in the school-room were learning their lessons—but he, burying himself in the cushions of his chair, showing nothing out of it but two little brown hands, twirling a paper-knife, or a pencil, or anything else he had got hold of, had nothing to do. Sometimes he would get up and walk to the window. When it was fine it would give him much pleasure to watch the birds collecting about the bread-crumbs, which he insisted on scattering everywhere.

“There is a lazy one, like me,” he would say; and a little pert robin redbreast, a sort of little almoner, who came and superintended the giving away of these charities, gave Sir Gus the greatest amusement. But the people who came to call were not equally amusing. When a man came, he expected Sir Gus to take an interest in the debates, or in the places where the hounds met, and stared, when he knew that Gus, like Gallio, cared for none of these things. And he was not even interested in the parish. When Dolly Stainforth brought up a report of some village catastrophe, Sir Gus was not the one who responded with the greatest liberality. He was not used to have very much money to spare, and he was careful of it. It was not that he loved money, but he had not the habit of spending it lavishly, as we foolish people have. Sometimes he would drive out in a close carriage, to the great contempt of everybody concerned.

“The new master, he *be* a muff,” the people in the porter’s lodge said. Even from that mild exercise, however, he was glad to come in, shivering, and call Brown to put on a great many more coals in the fire. The house was full of schemes for warming it more effectually. Hot water, hot air—all kinds of

expedients ; and never had so much fuel been used in Markham in the memory of man.

"He will ruin my lady in coals," Brown said ; but Sir Gus did not take this into consideration. It was about the greatest pleasure he had in the good fortune which was to make him so happy.

In February there came, as there sometimes comes, a spell of bright weather—a few soft, spring-like days—and the poor little gentleman from the tropics brightened along with the crocuses. "It is over at last," he said, in beatific self-delusion ; and he was persuaded to pay a visit to town when Parliament was on the point of meeting, and the general tuning up for the great concert of the season had begun to begin. Here Sir Gus was confided to the charge of Fairfax, who took him into his own house, and roasted him over huge fires, and made little dinners for him, collecting other tropical persons to meet him. But very soon Sir Gus found out that it was not over. He found out that not to be interested in the debates, nor in society, nor in books and pictures, and, above all, not to "know people," were sad drawbacks to life in London. He sat dumb while his companions talked of meeting So-and-so at Lord What-d'ye-call-'em's, and of the too-well-known intimacy—"Don't you know?"—between Sir Robert and Lady John. He stared at the talkers, the poor little foreigner ! and tired even of Fairfax's big fires. The skies that hang so low over the London streets, the rain and muddy ways, or the east wind that parched them into whiteness, made his very soul shrink. That was not at all a successful experiment. He went back on Lady Markham's hands in March, having ensconced himself now in a coat lined with sables, which buried him still more completely than the big chair.

"England is a very fine place," he said, with his teeth chattering, as he came in, out of a boisterous March wind, which carried upon it bushels of that dust

that is worth a king's ransom. "It is a very fine place, but—only I don't seem to agree with it." But that summer must certainly come some time—and spring was certainly come at this period, though Gus did not recognise that pleasant season in its English garb—they must all have given in altogether. But when the primroses appeared in the woods Sir Gus began to get back a little of his courage. Fortunately the summer opened brightly, promising to be as warm and genial as the winter had been severe; and by degrees the little gentleman let his fires go down, and left off his furs. Who can doubt that the winter had been very long at Markham for the whole household? They were living alone in their mourning, and Paul, though only in London, was separated from them, and in a state of great uncertainty and doubtful comfort. And other visitors were banished too. But when the spring came back the household awoke, and broke the bonds of gloom. Even Lady Markham began to smile naturally upon her children—not with the smile of duty put on for their advantage, but with a little natural rising of the clouds. And Alice brightened insensibly, knowing that "they" were to come for Easter; that is, Paul and "one of his friends." Nothing had been said to Alice upon any subject that was likely to agitate her prematurely, but it was pleasant to look forward to that visit from Paul and his friend—from which fact it may be divined that Lady Markham had been not unfavourably moved by the last item in Fairfax's confession.

Thus summer came again, communicating brightness; and Sir Gus began to live again, and to believe that it might be possible to put up with England after all.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THAT summer was as bright as the winter had been cold. The hot weather came on in May, and the country about Markham brightened into a perfect paradise of foliage and blossom. Sir Gus came to life ; he began to show himself in the country, to move about, to accept the invitations which were given to him. And it cannot be denied that his thoughts and plans were much modified after he had made acquaintance with the county and began to feel that people were inclined to pay him a great deal of attention. He had wanted nothing better at first than to be received as a member of Lady Markham's family, to adopt, as it were, his brothers and sisters, and to make them as little conscious as possible of the change he had brought into their life. He had promised that he would never marry, nor do anything to spoil Paul's prospects further. But before the summer was over his views in this respect had sensibly modified. He began to think that perhaps the length and dreariness of the winter had been partly owing to the fact that Lady Markham and her children were less satisfactory than a wife and children of his own. Why should he (after all) sacrifice himself to serve Paul? He was not old, whatever those arrogant young people might think ; and probably it was in this way that happiness might come to him. Paul would no doubt get on very well in society ; he would marry well, and his younger son's portion was not contemptible ; there really seemed no reason why his elder brother should sacrifice himself on Paul's account. And gradually there dawned upon him an idea that before winter came on again he might have some one belonging to him who should be his very own.

Gus dined out very solemnly by himself, making

acquaintance with his neighbours during the Easter recess, and when the great people of the neighbourhood came back to the country after the season; and did not scorn the tables of the less great who remained in the country all the year round. He was not exclusive. The less great houses were still great enough for Gus. He liked to go to the Rectory, where Mr. Stainforth, who was a politic old man, often invited him; and indeed, Sir Augustus, who everybody said was so exceedingly simple and unpretentious, became quite popular in the district where at first everybody had been against him as an intruder. Though it was no less hard upon Paul than before, the new heir was pardoned in the county because of his adoption of the family and his kindness and genuine humility. There could not be any harm in him, people said, when he was so good to the children, when he sought so persistently the friendship of his stepmother, and endeavoured to make everything pleasant for her.

Then it became very evident that Sir Gus, though not so young as he once was, was still marriageable and likely to marry, which naturally still further increased his popularity; and as, instead of attempting any stratagems of self-defence, he was but too eager to put himself into the society of young ladies, and showed unequivocal signs of regarding them with the eye of a purchaser, it was natural that the elder ladies should accept this challenge, and on their parts do what they could to make him acquainted with the stores the county possessed. Women do not give themselves to this business of settling marriages in England with the candour and honesty that prevail in other countries. The work is stealthy and unacknowledged, but it is too natural and too just not to be done with more or less vigour; and the county was not less active than other counties. "Poor Paul!" some people said, who had at first received the new baronet as a merely temporary holder of the title and estates—one who,

according to a legend dear to the popular mind, had bound himself not to do anything towards the achievement of an heir; but by and by they said, "Poor Sir Gus!" and could see no reason in the world why he should sacrifice himself. This was a little after the time when he had himself come to the same conclusion.

When all the families began to return at the end of July, he was asked everywhere. Mourning is not for a man a very rigid bond, and it was now nearly a year since Sir William died, so that there was nothing to restrain him; indeed there were some who said that Lady Markham was too punctilious in keeping Alice at home, never letting her be seen anywhere—a girl who really *ought* to marry, now that the family were in so changed a position. Sir Gus went a great deal to Westland Towers, where there had never been so many parties before—garden parties, archery meetings, competitions at lawn-tennis, to which the entire county was convoked; and at all these parties there was no more favoured guest than Gus. This was a great change, and pleased him much. At "home" he was not much more than put up with. They had come to like him, and they had always been very kind to him; but he had been an intruder, and he had banished the son of the house, and it was not to be supposed that mortal forbearance should go so far as to admire and honour him as the chief person in the household, even though he was its nominal head. When he went elsewhere Gus was made more of than at Markham, and at the Towers he felt the full force of his own position. His sayings were listened for, his jokes were laughed at, and he himself was followed by judicious flattery. All his little eccentricities were allowed and approved, his light clothes extolled as the most convenient garments in the world, and his distaste for sport and the winter amusements of country life sanctioned and approved.

"How men of refined habits can do it has always been a mystery to me," said Lady Westland.

"You forget, mamma, that a taste for bloodshed is one of the most refined tastes in the world," said Ada, who was herself fond of hunting when she had a chance, and never was better pleased than when she could lunch with a shooting party at the cover-side. Ada made a grimace behind Gus's back, and said "Little monster!" to the other young ladies.

"Ah, poor Paul! We used to see so much of him," she said, "when he was the man, poor fellow, and no one had ever heard of this little Creole. But parents are nothing if not prudent," Miss Westland added; "and now the tropics are in the ascendant, and poor Paul is nowhere. What can one do?" she said with a shrug of her shoulders up to her ears.

Dolly Stainforth, who was of the party, but not old enough or important enough to say anything, grew pale with righteous indignation. She was very well aware that Paul had never "seen much" of the family at Westland Towers: but that they should now pretend to hold him at arm's length stung her to the heart. This took place at a garden party, and the explanation about Paul had been made in the midst of a great many people of the neighbourhood, who had all been very sorry for Paul in their day, yet were all beginning now to turn towards the new-risen sun. Dolly had turned her back upon them, and gone off by herself in bitterly-suppressed indignation, sore and wounded, though not for her own sake, when she encountered Sir Gus, who had spied her in a turning of the shrubbery. George Westland had spied her too, but had been stopped by his mother on his way to her, and might be seen in the distance standing gloomily on the outskirts of a group of notables, with whom he was supposed to be ingratiating himself, gazing towards the *bosquet* in which the object of his affections had disappeared.

"What is the matter, Miss Dolly?" Sir Gus had said.

"Oh, nothing. I was not crying," Dolly said, with a sob. "I am too indignant to cry. It is the horridness of people," she cried with an outburst of wrath and grief. Sir Gus was distressed. He did not like to see any one cry, much less this dainty little creature, who was almost his first acquaintance in the place.

"Don't," he said, touching her shoulder lightly with his brown hand. "Whatever it is it cannot be worth crying about. None of them can do any harm to you."

"Harm to *me*! I wish they could," said Dolly; "that would not matter much. But don't believe them, don't you believe them: a little while ago they were all for Paul—nobody was so nice as Paul—and now it is all you, and Paul, they say, is nowhere. Do you think it is like a lady to say that poor Paul is 'nowhere,' only because he has lost his property, and you have got it?" cried Dolly, turning with fury, which it was difficult to restrain, upon the poor little baronet. He changed colour: of course he knew that it was his position, and not any special gifts of his own, which recommended him; yet he did not like the thought.

"That is not my fault, Miss Dolly," he said. "You should not be unjust; though it is your favourite who has been the loser, you ought not to be unjust, for I have nothing more than what is my right."

"Oh, Sir Augustus," said Dolly, alarmed by her own vehemence, "it was not you I meant. You have always been kind. It was those horrid people who think of nothing but who has the money. And then, you know," she said, turning her tearful eyes upon him, "I have known them all my life—and I can't bear to hear them speak so of Paul."

"And you can't bear me, I suppose, for putting this Paul of yours out of his place?" Gus said.

"No, indeed I don't blame you. A woman might have given it up, but it is not your fault if you are different from a woman—all men are," said Dolly,

shaking her head. "When one knows as much about a village as I do, one soon finds out that."

"I suppose you think the women are better than the men," said Sir Gus, shaking his head too.

"I am for my own side," said Dolly promptly, her tears drying up in the impulse of war; "but I did not mean that," she added, "only different. Men and women are not good—or nasty—in the same way. I don't suppose—you—could have done anything but what you did."

"I don't think I could," said Sir Gus, briefly.

"But the people here," said Dolly, "oh, the people here!" She stamped her foot upon the ground in her impatience and indignation; but when he would have pursued the subject, Dolly became prudent, and stopped short. She would say nothing more, except another appeal to heaven and earth against "the horridness of people." This, however, gave Sir Gus a great deal to think of. Dolly did not in the least know what he had in his mind. She was not aware that the little man was going about among all the pretty groups of the garden party in the conscious exercise of choice, noting all the ladies, selecting the one that pleased him. Two or three had pleased him more or less—but one most of all: which was what Dolly Stainforth never suspected. Sir Gus walked about with the air of a man occupied with important business. He had no time to pay any attention to the progress of the games that were going on; his own affairs engrossed him altogether. Sometimes he selected one lady from a number on pretence of showing her something, or of watching a game, or hearing the band play a particular air, and carried her off with him to the suggested object, talking much and earnestly. He did not pay much court to the mothers and chaperons, but went boldly to the fountain-head. And some of the pretty young women to whom he talked so gravely did not quite know what to make of the little baronet. They laughed among themselves,

and asked each other, "Did he ask you whether you liked town better or country? and if you would not like to take a voyage to the tropics?" Dolly on being asked this question quite early in their acquaintance, had answered frankly, "Not at all," and had further explained that life out of the parish was incomprehensible to her. "I could not leave my poor people for months and months, with nobody but papa to look after them," Dolly had said.

It was only after he had enjoyed about half a dozen interviews of this kind, amusing the greater part of his temporary companions, but fluttering the bosoms of one or two who were quick-witted enough to see the handkerchief trembling in the little sultan's hand, that Sir Gus allowed himself to be carried off in his turn by Ada Westland, who came up to him in her bold way, neglecting all decorum.

"Come with me, Sir Augustus," she said, "I have got a view to show you," and she led him to where, among the trees, there was a glimpse of the beautiful rich country, undulating, all wooded and rich with corn-fields, to where Markham Chase, with all its oaks and beeches, shut in the horizon line. There was a glimpse of the house to be had in the distance, peeping from the foliage: and in the centre of the scene, the red roofs of the village and the slope of the Rectory garden in the sunshine. "I used to be brought here often to have my duty taught me," said Ada. "Mamma made quite a point of it every day when we first came here."

"I am glad your duty makes you look at my house, Miss Westland," said Sir Gus, making her a bow.

"Oh, I don't mean now," said the outspoken young woman. "That is quite a different matter. I was quite young then, you know, and so was Paul, and my mother trained me up in the way that a girl should go. We are new people, you know; we have not much distinction in the way of family. What mamma intended to do with me was to make me marry Paul."

Once more Sir Augustus bowed his head quite gravely. He did not laugh at the bold announcement, as she meant he should. "Was your heart in it?" he said.

"My heart? Do you think I have got one? I don't know—I don't think it was, Sir Augustus. 'Look at all that sweep of country,' mamma used to say; 'that may all be yours if you play your cards well—and a family going back to the Conqueror.' There have only been two generations of us," said Ada; "you may think how grand it would have felt to know that there was a Crusader's monument in the family. In some moods of my mind, especially when I have been very much sat upon by the blue-blooded people, I don't think I should have minded marrying the Crusader himself."

"I can understand the feeling," said Gus. He was perfectly grave, his muscles did not relax a hairsbreadth. He stood and looked upon the woods that were his own, and the house which he called home. It looked a little chilly to him, even in the midst of the sunshine. The sky was pale with heat, and all the colours of the country subdued in the brilliant afternoon light, the trees hanging together like terrestrial clouds, the stubble-fields grey where the corn had been already cut, and the roads white with dust. But it did not occur to him as he stood and gazed at Markham that it would make him happy to live there with his present companion by his side. "Beauty is deceitful, and favour is vain." She was one of the prettiest persons present. She was full of wit and cleverness, and had far more wit and knowledge than half of her party put together. But the heart of the little baronet was not gained by those qualities. He stood quite unmoved by Ada's side. She might have married the Crusader for anything Sir Augustus cared. Ada waited a little to see if no better reply would come, and then she made another *coup*.

"Pity us for an unfortunate family, foiled on every side," she said. "Paul you know, has ceased to be a *parti* altogether. Anybody may marry him who

pleases—and to a district in which men do not abound this is a great grievance—but I don't blame you for that, Sir Augustus, though some do. And look there," she said, suddenly turning round, "look at the door of the conservatory. There are mamma's hopes tumbling down in another direction. I don't feel the disappointment so much in my own case, but about George, I do really pity mamma. She can't marry me to the next property, as she intended; and just look at George, making a fool of himself with the parson's daughter. Now, Sir Augustus, don't you feel sorry for mamma?"

"Miss Stainforth is a very charming young lady," said Sir Gus, still as grave as ever, "but I thought that she——" here he stopped in some confusion, having nearly committed himself, he felt.

"I know what you were going to say," said Ada, with a laugh. "You think she had a fancy for Paul too. She might just as well have had a fancy for the moon. The Markhams would never have permitted that; and as for Paul himself, he thought no more of Dolly——! Fancy, Dolly! but my brother does. It is a pity, a great pity, don't you think, that brothers and sisters can't change places sometimes? George would have made a much better young lady than I do. I am much too outspoken and candid for a girl, but I should never have fallen in love with Dolly Stainforth. If mamma could change us now, it would be some consolation to her still."

"Miss Stainforth is a very charming young lady," Sir Gus said again.

"A—ah!" said Ada, with a malicious laugh, "you admire Dolly too, Sir Augustus? I beg a thousand pardons. I ought to have been more cautious. But I never thought that a man who had seen the world, a man of judgment, a person with experience and discrimination——"

"You think too favourably of me," said Sir Gus. "It is true I have come over a great part of the world;

but I don't know that of itself that gives one much experience. You think too favourably of me."

"That is a fault," said Ada, "which most men pardon very easily," and she looked at him in a way that was flattering, Gus felt, but a little alarming too.

This conversation too had its effect upon him. He felt that there was no time to lose in making up his mind. If he was to secure for himself a companion before the winter came on, it would be well not to lose any time. And Miss Westland was very flattering and agreeable; she seemed to have a very high opinion of him. Gus did not feel that she was the woman he would like to marry; but if by any chance it might happen that she was a woman who would like to marry him, he did not feel that she would be very easy to resist. That such a woman might possibly wish to marry him was of itself very flattering; still on the whole, Gus felt that he would prefer to choose rather than to be chosen. And with a shrewd sense of the difficulties of his position, he decided that to have another young lady betrothed to him would be by far his best safeguard against Ada. A woman who belonged to him would stand up for him; and the mere fact that he belonged to her would be an effectual defence. As it happened, fortune favoured him. Mrs. Booth, who had come with Dolly in her little carriage to the Towers, wanted to get back early, as the evening was so fine, and Dolly declared that there was nothing she would like so much as to walk. There would certainly be somebody going her way to bear her company. Then Sir Gus stepped forward and said he would certainly be going her way, and would walk with her to the Rectory gate. Dolly smiled upon him so gratefully when he said this that his heart stirred in Gus's bosom. She kept near him all the rest of the time, coming up to him now and then to see if he was ready, if he wished to go, with much filial attention; but Gus did not think of it in that light. Nor did he think that it was by way of

getting rid of George Westland that she devoted herself to him. This is not an idea which naturally suggests itself to a man who has never had any reason to think badly of himself. Gus had always, on the contrary, entertained a very good opinion of himself; he had known that, on the whole, he deserved that mankind in general should entertain a good opinion of him, and there was nothing at all out of the way, or even unexpected in the fact that Dolly should be pleased by his care of her, and attracted towards himself. It was a thing which was very natural and delightful, and pleased him greatly. When the company began to disperse, he was quite ready to obey Dolly's indication of a wish to go, and to take leave of Lady Westland when her son was out of the way, according to the girl's desire. They set out upon the dusty road together in the grateful cool of the summer evening, carriage after carriage rolling past them, with many nods and wreathed smiles from the occupants, and no doubt many remarks also upon Dolly's cavalier. But the pair themselves took it very tranquilly. They went slowly along, lingering on the grassy margin of the road to escape the dust, and enjoying the coolness and the quiet.

"How sweet it is," Dolly said, "after the heat of the day."

"You call that hot, Miss Dolly?" said Gus. "We should not call it hot where I come from."

"Well, I am glad I have nothing to do with the tropics," Dolly said. "I like the cool evening better than the day. One can move now—one can walk; but I suppose you never can do anything there in the heat of the day?"

"I am sorry you don't like the tropics," he said. "I think you would, though, if you had ever been there. It is more natural than England. Yes, you laugh, but I know what I mean. I should like to show you the bright-coloured flowers, and the birds, and all the things so full of colour—there's no colour here. I tell

Bell and Marie so, and they tell me it is I that can't see. And then the winter——" Gus shuddered as he spoke.

"But you ought to have gone out more," said Dolly, "and taken exercise; that makes the blood run in your veins. Oh, I like the winter! We have not had any skating here for years. It has been so mild. I like a good sharp frost, and no wind, and a real frosty sun, and the ice bearing. You don't know how delightful it is."

"No, indeed," said Gus, with a shudder. "But, perhaps," he added, "if one had a bright little companion like you, one might be tempted to move about more. Bell and Marie are delightful children, but they are a little too young, you know."

"But Alice——" said Dolly, with a little anxiety.

"Alice never has quite forgiven me, I fear; and then she has her mother to think of; and they always tell me she cannot do this or that for her mourning. It is very right to wear mourning, I don't doubt," said Gus, "but never to be able to go out, or meet your fellow-creatures——"

"That would be *impossible*!" said Dolly, with decision. "It is not a year yet. *You* did not know poor Sir William. But next winter it will be different, and we must all try to do our best"—for Lady Markham, she was going to say—but he interrupted her.

"That will be very kind, Miss Dolly. I think you could do a great deal without trying very much. I always feel more cheerful in your company. Do you remember the first time we ever were in each other's company, on the railway?"

"Oh, yes," cried Dolly. She was very incautious. "I thought you were such a——" She did not *say* queer little man, but felt as if she had said it, so near was it to her lips; and blushed, which pleased Gus greatly, and made him imagine a much more flattering conclusion. "You asked me a great deal about poor

Paul," she said, "and then we met them coming home; and Sir William, oh! how ill he looked—as if he would die!"

"You remember that day?" said Gus, much delighted, "and so do I. You told me a great deal about my family. It was strange to talk of my family as if I had been a stranger, and to hear so much about them."

"I thought you were a stranger, Sir Augustus."

"Yes, and you wished I had been one when you found out who I really was. Oh, I don't blame you, Miss Dolly—it was very natural; but I hope now, my dear," he said, with a tone that was quite fatherly, though he did not intend it to be so, "that you are not so sorry, but rather glad on the whole to know Gus Markham, who is not so bad as you thought."

Dolly was surprised to be called "my dear;" but at his age was it not quite natural?

"Oh," she said, faltering, "I never thought you were bad, Sir Augustus; you have always been very kind, I know."

But she could not say she was glad of his existence, which had done so much harm to—other people; even though in her heart she had a liking for Sir Gus, the queerest little man that ever was!

"I have tried to be," he said; "and I think they all feel I have done my best to show myself a real friend; but there comes a time when one wants something more than a friend, and, Dolly, I think that time has come now."

Well! it was a little odd, but she did not at all mind being called Dolly by Sir Gus. She looked at him with a little surprise, doubtful what he could mean. They were by this time quite near the village and the Rectory gate.

"I think," he said, "that if I don't get married, my dear, I shall never be able to stand another winter at Markham. It nearly killed me last year."

"Married!" she cried, her voice going off in a high quaver of surprise and consternation. If her father had intimated a similar intention she could scarcely have been more astonished. This is what everybody had consoled themselves by thinking such a man was never likely to do.

"Yes, married," he said. "Don't you think you know, Dolly, a dear little girl that would marry me, though I am not so young nor so handsome as Paul? You see it is not Paul now, it is me; and though he was handsomer and taller, I don't think he was nearly so good-tempered as I am, my dear. I give very little trouble, and I should always be willing to do what my wife wanted to do—or at least almost always, Dolly—and you would not get that with many other men. Haven't you ever thought of it before? Oh, I have, often. I went through all the others to-day, just to give myself a last chance, to see if, at the last moment, there was any one I liked better; but there was none so nice as you. You see, I have not done it without thought. Now, my pretty Dolly, my little dear, just say you will marry me before the winter, and to-morrow we can settle all the rest."

He had taken her hand as they stood together at the gate. Dolly's amazement knew no bounds. She was so bewildered that she could only stand and gaze at him with open mouth.

"Do you mean me?" she cried at last—"me?" with mingled horror and surprise. "I don't know what you mean!" she said.

"Yes, my dear, I mean you. I tell you I looked again at all the rest, and there was not one so nice. Of course I mean you, Dolly. I have always been fond of you from the first. I will make you a good husband, dear, and you will make me a sweet little wife."

"Oh, no, no, no!" Dolly cried. The world, and the sky, and the trees, seemed to be going round with

her. She caught at the gate to support herself. "No, no, no! It is all a dreadful mistake."

"It cannot be a mistake. I know very well what I am doing, Dolly."

"But oh dear! oh dear! Sir Augustus, let me speak. Do you think I know what I am doing? No, no, no, *no*! You must be going out of your senses to ask me."

"Why? because you are so young and so little? But that is just what I like. You are the prettiest of all the girls. You are a dear, sweet, good little thing that will never disappoint me. No, no, it is no mistake."

To see him standing there beaming and smiling through the dusk was a terrible business for Dolly.

"It *is* a mistake. I cannot, cannot do it—indeed I cannot. I will not marry you—never! I don't want to marry anybody," she said, beginning to weep in her excitement.

Now and then a villager would lumber by, and, seeing the couple at the porch, grin to himself and think that Miss Dolly was just the same as the other lasses. It was a pity the gentleman was so little, was all they said.

CHAPTER XLIV.

At last the year of the mourning was over. The Lennys, the good colonel and his wife, had come to Markham a few days before, and he was a great godsend to the boys, who were vaguely impressed by the anniversary, but could not but feel the grief a little tedious which had lasted a whole year. They were very glad to go out quite early in the morning with the colonel, not at all, as it were, for their own pleasure, but because

his visit was to be short, and the keeper was in despair about the birds which no one shot, and which Sir Augustus was so utterly indifferent about.

"He wouldn't mind a bit if the place was given up to the poachers," Harry said. "He says, 'What's the good of the game—can't we buy all we want?' I think he is cracked on that point."

"I don't mind Gus at all in some things," said Roland. "He's not half a bad fellow in some things; but he's an awful muff—no one can deny that."

"He has not been brought up as you have been," the colonel said.

While they stole out in the early morning, the old man and the boys, all keen with anticipated pleasure, Gus felt already the first *frisson* of approaching winter in the sunny haze of September, and had coverings heaped upon him, and dressed by the fire when he got up two hours after. Poor Sir Gus was not at all cheerful. Dolly's refusal had not indeed broken his heart, but it had disappointed him very much, and he did not know what he was to do to make life tolerable now that this expedient had failed. The anniversary oppressed him more or less, not with grief, but with a sense that, after all, the huge change and advancement that had come to him with his father's death had not perhaps brought all he expected it to bring. To be Sir Augustus, and have a fine property and more money than he knew how to spend, and a grand position, had not increased his happiness. On the contrary, it seemed to him that the first day he had come to Markham, when the children had given him luncheon and showed so much curiosity about him as a relation, had been happier than any he had known since. He too had been full of lively curiosity and expectation, and had believed himself on the verge of a very happy change in his life. But he did not anticipate the death or the trouble to others which were the melancholy gates by which he had to enter upon his higher life. When he had dressed he

sat over the fire thinking of it on that bright September morning. He was half angry because he could not get rid of the feeling of the anniversary. After all, there was nothing more sad in the fifteenth of September than in any other day. But Lady Markham, no doubt, would shut herself up, and Alice look at him as if, somehow or other, he was the cause of it; and they would speak in subdued tones, and it would be a kind of sin to do or say anything amusing. Gus could not but feel a little irritation thinking of the long day before him, and then of the long winter that was coming. And all the prophets said it was to be a hard winter. The holly-trees in the park, where they grew very tall, were already crimson with berries. Already one or two nights' frost had made the geraniums droop. A hard winter! The last had been said to be a mild one. If this was worse than that, Sir Gus did not know what he should do.

The day, however, passed over more easily than he thought. His aunt, Mrs. Lenny, was a godsend to him as the colonel was to the boys. She made him talk of nothing but "the island" all the day long. It was long since she had left it. She wanted to know about everybody, the old negroes, the governor's parties, the regiments that had been there. On her side she had a hundred stories to tell of her own youth, which looked all the brighter for being so far in the distance. They took a drive together in the middle of the day, basking in the sunshine, and as the evening came on they had a roaring fire, and felt themselves in the tropics.

"Shouldn't you like to go back?" Mrs. Lenny said. "If I were as rich as you, Gus, I'd have my estate there, like in the old days, and there I'd spend my winters. With all the money you've got, what would it matter whether it paid or not? You could afford to keep everything up as in the old days."

"But there's the sea. I would do it in a moment,"

Gus said, his brown face lighting up, "but for the sea."

"You would soon get used to the sea—it's nothing. You would get over the sickness in a day, and then it's beautiful. Take me with you one time, Gus, there's a darling. I'd like to see it all again before I die."

"I'll think of it," Gus said: and indeed for the next twenty-four hours he thought of nothing else.

Would it be possible? Some people went to Italy for the winter, why not to Barbadoes? No doubt it was a longer voyage; but then what a different life, what a smoothed and warmed existence, without all this English cold and exercise. He thought of it, neither more nor less, all the next night and all the next day.

And no doubt it was a relief to the house in general when the anniversary was over. A vague lightening, no one could tell exactly what, was in the atmosphere. They had spared no honour to the dead, and now it was the turn of the living. To see Bell and Marie in white frocks was an exhilaration to the house. And it cannot be said that any one was surprised when quite quietly, without any warning, Fairfax walked into the hall where the children were all assembled next day. He had paid them various flying visits with Paul during the past year, coming for a day or two at Easter, for a little while in the summer. But there was something different, they all thought, about him now. From the moment when Lady Markham had been informed of that one little detail of his circumstances mentioned in a previous chapter, the young man had taken a different aspect in her eyes. He had no longer seemed the careless young fellow of no great account one way or another, very "nice," very simple and humble-minded, the most good-humoured of companions and serviceable of friends, which was how he appeared to all the rest. Mr. Brown had judged justly from the first. The simplicity of the young millionaire had not taken in his

experienced faculties. He had always been respectful, obsequious, devoted, long before any one else suspected the truth. How it was, however, that Lady Markham—who was very different from Brown, who considered herself above the vulgar argument of wealth, one to whom the mystic superiority of blood was always discernible, and a rich *roturier* rather less agreeable than a poor one—how it was that she looked upon this easy, careless, lighthearted young man, who was ready to make himself the servant of everybody, and who made his way through life like an obscure and trusted but careless spectator, rather than an agent of any personal importance—with altogether different eyes after the secret of his wealth had been communicated to her, is what we do not pretend to explain. She said to herself that it did not, could not, make any difference; but she knew all the same that it made an immense difference. Had he been poor as well as a nobody, she would have fought with all her powers against all and every persuasion which might have been brought to bear upon her. She would have accorded him her daughter only as it were at the sword's point, if it had been a matter of life and death to Alice. But when she knew of Fairfax's wealth, Lady Markham's opposition gradually and instinctively died away. She said it was the same as ever; but while she said so, felt the antagonism and the dislike fading out of her mind, why, she did not know. His wealth was something external to himself, made no difference in him; but somehow it made all the difference. Lady Markham from that moment gave up the struggle. She made up her mind to him as her son. She never thought more about his grandfather. Was this worldly-mindedness, love of money on her part? It was impossible to think so, and yet what was it? She did not herself understand, and who else could do so?

But nobody else had been aware of this change in the standard by which Fairfax was judged, and every-

body had treated him easily, carelessly, as before. Only when he appeared to-day the family generally were conscious of a difference. He was more serious, even anxious; he had not an ear for every piece of nonsense as before, but was grave and pre-occupied, not hearing what was said to him. Mrs. Lenny thought she knew exactly what was the matter. He attracted her special sympathies.

"Poor young fellow," she said, "he's come courting, and he might just as well court the fairies at the bottom of the sea. My Lady Markham's not the woman I take her for if she'll ever give her pretty daughter to the likes of him."

"He wants to marry Alice, do you think?" said Gus. "I wonder if *she'll* have nothing to say to him either?"

He was thinking of Dolly, but Mrs. Lenny understood that it was of Lady Markham's opposition he thought.

"I would not answer for the girl herself," Mrs. Lenny said; "but Gus, my dear, you have done harm enough in this house; here's a case in which you might be of use. You have neither chick nor child. Why shouldn't you settle something on your pretty young sister, and let her marry the man she likes?"

"No, I have neither chick nor child," Gus said.

It was not a speech that pleased him, and yet it was very true. He pondered this question with a continually increasing depression in his mind all day. He could not get what he wanted himself, but he might help Fairfax to get it, and make up to him for the imperfections of fortune. Perhaps he might even be asked, for anything he could tell, to serve Paul in the same way. This made the little baronet sad, and even a little irritated. Was this all he had been made a great man for, an English landed proprietor, in order that he should use his money to get happiness for other people, none for himself?

In the meantime Fairfax had followed Alice to the west room, her mother's favourite place, but Lady Markham was not there.

"I will tell mamma. I am sure she will be glad to see you," Alice said.

"Just one moment—only wait one moment," Fairfax said, detaining her with his hand raised in appeal.

But when she stopped at his entreaty he did not say anything. What answer could she make him? She was standing waiting with a little wonder and much embarrassment. And he said nothing; at last—

"Paul is very well," he said.

"I am very glad. We heard from him yesterday."

Then there was another pause.

"Miss Markham," said Fairfax, "I told your mother myself of *that*, you know, and a great deal more. She was not so—angry as I feared."

"Angry!" Alice laughed a little, but very nervously. "How could she be angry? It was not anything that could——"

What had she been going to say? Something cruel, something that she did not mean.

"Nothing that could—matter to you? I was afraid not," said Fairfax; "that is what I have been fearing you would say."

"Of course it does not matter to us," said Alice, "how should it? Why should it matter to any one? We are not such poor creatures, Mr. Fairfax. You think you—like us; but you have a very low opinion of us after all."

"No, I don't think I like you. I think something very different. You know what I think," he said. "It all depends upon what you will say. I have waited till yesterday was over and would not say a word; but now the world had begun again. How is it to begin for me? It has not been good for very much in the past; but there might be new heavens and a new earth if—— Alice!" he cried, coming

close to her, his face full of emotion, his hands held out.

"Mr. Fairfax!" she said, drawing back a step. "There is mamma to think of. I cannot go against her. I must do what she says."

"Just one word, whatever comes of it, to myself—from you to me—from you to me! And after," he said, breathless, "she shall decide."

Alice did not say any word. Perhaps she had not time for it—perhaps it was not needed. But just then the curtains that half veiled the west room were drawn aside with a fretful motion.

"If it is you who are there, Alice and Fairfax," said Sir Gus—and in his voice, too, there was a fretful tone, "I just want to say one word. I'll make it all right for you. You need not be afraid of mamma. I'll make it all right with her. There! that was all I wanted to say."

When Sir Gus had delivered himself of this little speech he went off again very hastily to the hall, not meaning to disturb any tender scene. The idea had struck him all at once, and he carried it out without giving himself time to think. It did him a little good; but yet he was cross, not like himself, Bell and Marie thought. There was a fire in the hall, too, which the children, coming in hot and flushed from their games, had found great fault with.

"You will roast us all up; you will make us thin and brown like yourself," said Bell, who was always saucy.

"Am I so thin and so brown?" the poor little gentleman had said. "Yes, I suppose so, not like you, white and red."

"Oh, Bell, how could you talk so, to hurt his feelings?" said little Marie, as they stood by the open door and watched him, standing sunning himself in the warmth.

His brown face looked very discontented, sad, yet

soft, with some feeling that was not anger. The little girls began to draw near. For one thing the autumn air was cool in the afternoon, and their white frocks were not so thick as their black ones. They began to see a little reason in the fire. Then Bell, always the foremost, sprang suddenly forward, and clasped his arm in both hers.

"He is quite right to have a fire," she said. "And I hate you for being cross about it, Marie. He is the kindest old brother that ever was. I don't mind being roasted, or any thing else Gus pleases."

"Oh, Gus, you know it wasn't me!" cried Marie, clinging to the other arm.

His face softened as he looked from one to another.

"It wasn't either of you," he said. "I was cross, too. It is the cold—it is the winter that is coming. One can't help it."

It was not winter that was coming, but still there was a chill little breeze playing about, and the afternoon was beginning to cloud over. Lady Markham coming down stairs was struck by the group in the full light of the fire, which threw a ruddy gleam into the clouded daylight. Something touched her in it. She paused and stood beside them, looking at him kindly.

"You must not let them bother you. You are too kind to them," she said.

Just then the post-bag came in, and Mrs. Lenny along with it, eager, as people who never have any letters to speak of always are, about the post. They all gathered about while the bag was opened and the letters distributed. All that Mrs. Lenny got was a newspaper—a queer little tropical broadsheet, which was of more importance, as it turned out, than all the letters which the others were reading. She put herself by the side of the fire to look over it, while Lady Markham in the window opened her correspondence, and Gus took the stamps off a foreign letter he had received to give them to Bell and Marie. The little

girls were in all the fervour of stamp-collecting. They had a book full of the choicest specimens, and this was just the kind of taste in which Sir Gus could sympathise. He was dividing the stamps between them equally, bending his little brown head to the level of Marie, for Bell was now quite as tall as her brother. Their little chatter was restrained, for the sake of mamma and Colonel Lenny, who were both reading letters, into a soft hum of accompaniment, which somehow harmonised with the ruddy glow of the fire behind them, warming the dull air of the afternoon.

"That will make the German ones complete," Bell was saying. And, "Oh, if I had only a Greek, like Bell, I should be happy!" cried Marie. The little rustle of the newspaper in Mrs. Lenny's hand was almost as loud as their subdued voices. All at once, into the midst of this quiet, there came a cry, a laughing, a weeping, and Mrs. Lenny, jumping up, throwing down the chair she had been sitting on, rushed at Sir Gus, thrusting the paper before him, and grasping his arm with all her force.

"Oh, Gus, Gus, Gus!" she cried, "Oh, Colonel, look here! Gavestonville estate's in the market. The old house is going to be sold again. Oh, Colonel, why haven't we got any money to buy it, you and me!"

"Give it here," said Sir Gus.

He held it over Marie's head, who stood shadowed by it as under a tent, gazing up at him and holding her stamp in her hand. The little gentleman did not say another word. He paid no attention either to Mrs. Lenny's half hysterics or the calls of little Marie, who had a great deal to say to him about her stamp. His face grew pale with excitement under the brown. He walked straight away from them, up the staircase and to his own room; while even Lady Markham, roused from her letters, stood looking after him and listening to the footstep ringing very clear and steady, but with a sound of agitation in it, step by step up the stairs and

along the corridor above. It seemed to them all, young and old, as if something had happened, but what they could not tell.

Sir Gus was very grave at dinner: he did not talk much—and though he was more than usually kind, yet he had not much to say, even to the children, after. But by this time the interest had shifted in those changeable young heads to Fairfax, who was the last novelty, “engaged to” Alice, a piece of news which made Bell and Marie tremulous with excitement, and excited an instinctive opposition in Roland and Harry. But when the evening was over Gus requested an interview with Lady Markham, and conducted her with great solemnity to the library, though it was a room he did not love. There he placed himself in front of the fire, contemplating her with a countenance quite unlike his usual calm.

“I have something very important to tell you,” he said. “I have taken a resolution, Lady Markham.” And in every line of the little baronet’s figure it might be seen how determined this resolution was.

“Tell me what it is,” Lady Markham said, as he seemed to want her to say something. And then Sir Gus cleared his throat as if he were about to deliver a speech.

“It is—but first let me tell you that I promised to make it all right for those young people, Alice and Fairfax. I hope you’ll let them be happy. It seems to me that to be happy when you are young, when you can have it is the best thing. I promise to make it all right with you. I’ll settle upon her whatever you think necessary.”

“You have a heart of gold,” said Lady Markham, much moved, “and they will be as grateful to you as if they wanted it. Mr. Fairfax,” she said (and Lady Markham, though she was not mercenary, could not not help saying it with a little pride), “Mr. Fairfax is very rich. He has a great fortune; he can give Alice

everything that could be desired—though all the same, dear Gus, they will be grateful to you.”

“Ah!” said Sir Gus, with a blank air of surprise like a man suddenly stopped by a blank wall. He made a dead stop and looked at her, then resumed. “I have taken a resolution, Lady Markham. I think I never ought to have come here; at all events it has not done me very much good, has it, nor any one else? And I daren’t face another winter. I think I should die. Perhaps if I had married and that sort of thing it might have been better. It is too late to think of that now.”

“Why too late?” said Lady Markham. Her heart had begun to beat loudly; but she would not be outdone in generosity, and indeed nothing had been more kind than poor Gus. She determined to fight his battle against himself. “Why too late? You must not think so. You will not find the second winter so hard as the first—and as for marrying——”

“Yes, that’s out of the question, Lady Markham; and at first I never meant to, because of Paul. So here is what I am going to do. You heard what old Aunt Katie said. The old house is for sale again; the old place where she was born and I was born, my uncle’s old place that he had to sell, where I am as well known as Paul is at Markham. I am going back there; don’t say a word. It’s better for me, and better for you, and all of us. I’ll take the old woman with me, and I’ll be as happy as the day is long.”

Here Gus gave a little gulp. Lady Markham got up and went towards him with her hand extended in anxious deprecation, though who can tell what a storm was going on in her bosom, of mingled reluctance and expectation—an agitation beyond words. He too raised his hand to keep her silent.

“Don’t say anything,” he said; “I’ve made up my mind; it will be a great deal better. Paul can come back, and I dare say he’ll marry little Dolly. You can

say I hope he will, and make her a good husband. And since Fairfax is rich, why that is all right without me. Send for Paul, my lady, and we'll settle about the money; for I must have money you know. I must have my share. And I'd like to give a sort of legacy to the little girls. They're fond of me, really, those two children, they are now, though you might not think it."

"We are all fond of you," said Lady Markham, with tears.

"Well, perhaps that is too much to expect; but you have all been very kind. Send for Paul, and make him bring the lawyer, and we'll get it all settled. I shall go out by the next steamer," said Sir Gus, after a little pause, recovering his usual tone. "No more of this cold for me. I shall be king at Gavestonville, as Paul will be here. I don't think, Lady Markham, I have anything more to say."

"But," she cried clinging to her duty. "*But*—I don't know what to say to you. Gus—Gus!"

"I have made up my mind," said the little gentleman with great dignity, and after that there was not another word to say.

But there was a great convulsion in Markham when Sir Gus went away. The children were inconsolable. And Dolly stood by the Rectory gate when his carriage went past to the railway with the tears running down her cheeks. He had the carriage stopped at that last moment, and stepped out to speak to her, letting his fur cloak fall on the road.

"Marry Paul, my dear," he said, "that will be a great deal better than if you had married me. But you may give me a kiss before I go away."

There was a vague notion in Sir Gus's mind that little Dolly had wanted to marry him, but that he had discouraged the idea. He spoke in something of the

same voice to the children as they saw him go away, watched him driving off. "I can't take you with me," he said, "but you shall come and see me." And so, with great dignity and satisfaction, Sir Gus went away.

Thus Paul Markham had his property again when he had given up all thought of it; but the little gentleman who is the greatest man in Barbadoes has not the slightest intention of dying to oblige him, and in all likelihood the master of Markham will never be Sir Paul.

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THE END.

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